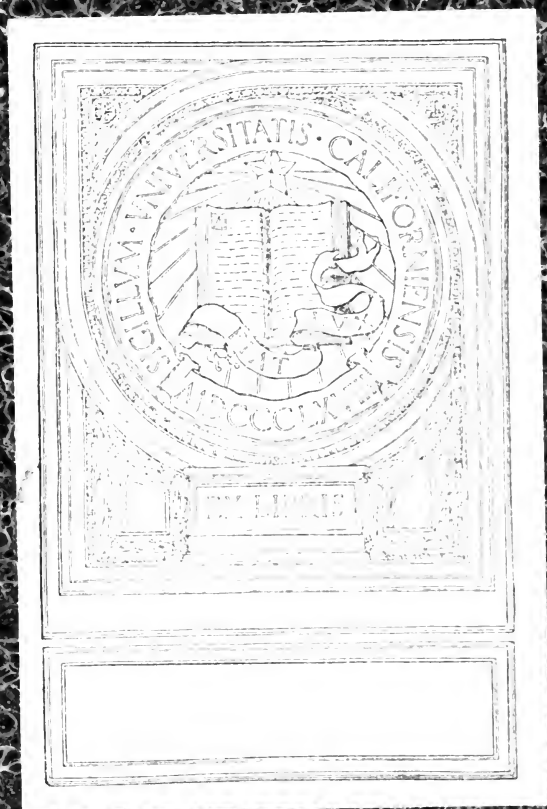
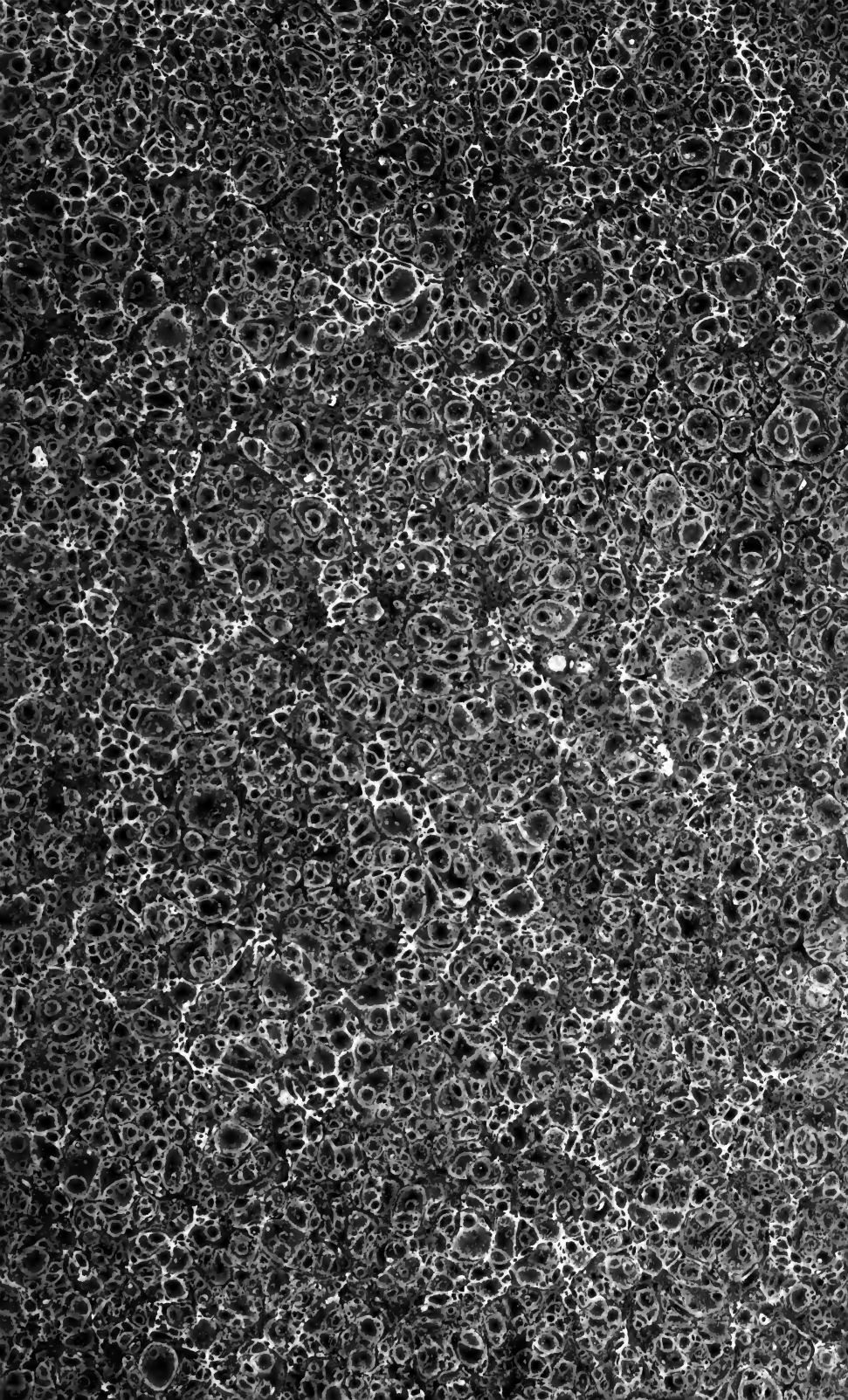


UC-NRLF



B 4 601 675





157,

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2007 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

JOHN;

OR,

IS A COUSIN IN THE HAND,
WORTH TWO COUNTS IN THE BUSH?

BY

EMILIE CARLEN,

AUTHOR OF

"THE ROSE OF TISLETON," "WOMAN'S LIFE," "THE BIRTHRIGHT," ETC.

REPRINTED WITHOUT ABRIDGMENT FROM THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION.

NEW YORK:

D. APPLETON & COMPANY,

346 & 348 BROADWAY.

M.DCCCLIV.



P 7741
J6

JOHN;

OR,

IS A COUSIN IN THE HAND WORTH TWO COUNTS IN THE BUSH?

CHAPTER I.

CLOUDS.

"My venerable grandmother, who had seen the world, used to say, 'that even the blackest clouds will roll away, and then the sun will shine forth once more;' and in these words there is much wisdom."

"Wisdom?" repeated a clear youthful voice, but with a shade of dissatisfaction in the tone: "I cannot say that such wisdom appears to me particularly consolatory; for think how many dark clouds may gather over our heads before a single sunbeam comes to gladden us."

"The times are coming to a pretty pass, truly, when the young can doubt the words of the aged, and cavil at their maxims."

"I do not cavil—I only weep."

"And I do something better—I exert myself, and act."

"Exert yourself and act?"—the astonishment expressed in the young voice was great—"How can we do so here? We might consider ourselves fortunate, indeed, if we had any opportunity for action."

"Those that seek shall find," as my grandmother used to say. But now come down, and you shall hear whether there is truth in her words, or not."

The speakers in the above dialogue were the widow and daughter of the late Sweyn von Kühlen, a nobleman and subaltern officer in the royal regiment of Westgötadal, the former standing on the staircase, and the latter at an attic window, which commanded an uninterrupted prospect down the narrow lane, in which might now be seen four persons bending their steps away from the residence of the late subaltern, and carrying a litter covered with some dark material, beneath which was concealed something which in the spring twilight might easily have been mis-

taken for a coffin of unusually large dimensions. It was, however, nothing of the sort.

It was only an old harpsichord that lay upon the litter; but the word "only" is often as full of pathetic meaning as the most harrowing romance.

This harpsichord was the last remaining piece of personalty that was carried away after the sale by auction of the property of the late subaltern. But if the removal of beds, tables, and chairs had already caused many a stifled sigh, they were but dust in the balance when weighed against those called forth by the departure of the harpsichord, to which were attached many proud and cherished memories connected with the history of the little family, of which it might have been regarded as the chronicle.

The paternal grandmother of the widow, Margaret Emerentia von Kühlen—the same who had seen the world, and had, therefore, always been regarded as an oracle in the family—had, in the days of her youth, received this harpsichord as a wedding present, and, having no daughter of her own had bequeathed it to her daughter-in-law, by which means it had been handed down to its last possessor in the family, Blenda von Kühlen, then a girl of sixteen, who, however, only enjoyed, for the space of one twelvemonth, the happiness of calling it her own.

This one year had, however, amply sufficed to initiate Blenda into all the secrets of the harpsichord, which were faithfully handed down by the mother to the daughter; and often and often had Madame von Kühlen repeated to the then presumptive heiress—"I was seated precisely where you are now, playing the accompaniment to the song of Sir Kuno, when Sweyn Göran wooed me to become his wife; and in the very same place did my mother, who was brought up in my grandmother's house, three times refuse a wealthy baron, and at length accept the ad-

dresses of my father." And faster and faster throbbed the heart of the youthful Blenda as she listened to the details of all these interesting reminiscences.

She could not help thinking how probable it was that some day, when she should be singing *her* favorite song of Sir Egbert, she might find herself placed in the same delicate situation as her mother and grandmother had been before her, and imagining the answers she would return to similar admirers.

But sweetly as Blenda sang; diligently as she practised, under the direction of her mother and the parish organist; deep as was the pathos she infused into her performance, the expected knight-errant did not make his appearance.

In his stead came illness and death—poverty was already an old friend,—and now the song was hushed, and the bright hopes faded away, for many a dense cloud had obscured the sky from the day that her father was stretched upon the bed of sickness whence he never rose again, until the present one, when the measure of their sorrow was filled up by the removal of the treasured heirloom, and it was to take one last look at her old harpsichord, which had played so prominent a part, both in her education and in her pleasures, that Blenda had stationed herself at the attic window; but during her conversation with her mother it vanished from her sighs, the bearers having reached the turn into the wood.

"I do not cavil, I only weep," had she said to her mother—and she spoke the truth; for if the reiteration of the same consolations to which she had listened so often had awakened in her bosom a momentary feeling of impatience, yet her gentle and trustful nature had never even in thought repined at the darkness which had fallen upon her youth.

She might well, however, be forgiven for shedding a few tears at the bitter thought that she should never again listen to the harmonious notes without the accompaniment of which even the song of Sir Egbert could give her but little pleasure.

* * * * *

A few minutes later the two bereaved women were seated in the small bedroom which they shared together, and which was but scantily fitted up with the little that they had been able to save from the wreck, together with a few articles of furniture which Madame von Kühlen had bought in at the auction.

"Well, dearest mother, from what quarter does the sun shine?" asked Blenda, smiling through her tears.

"If you cannot, as yet, see the sun himself, I can at least point out to you a stray sunbeam, and I should think that would be sufficient to revive your drooping spirits."

"I think so too, for I already feel a little revived by mere curiosity."

"Well, but wait, my dear; you must learn to be patient."

"Patient!" repeated Blenda with a sigh.

"Yes, indeed; and while you dry your

tears, just tell me whether you have ever in all your life seen my courage fail, except once; and that was beside the death-bed of your father?"

"No, dear mother, that I never did! But then, you are an exception to the general rule; and I know what poor papa used often to say."

"What was that?" asked the good woman with a look of pleasure which showed that she knew very well what it was; but there are words which we never weary of hearing repeated.

"He used to say, 'My dear Emerentia, if it were not for your buoyant hopes and bright dreams, we should never be as rich nor as happy as we are in the midst of our poverty.'"

Madame von Kühlen wiped her eyes. "Dear soul!" said she, "even to the last day of his life he never lost faith in me and in my predictions."

"But these hopes and dreams were never realized," objected Blenda after a few moments' silence.

"Well, and what then! They made us happy so long as we cherished them—and besides, they *were* fulfilled sometimes."

Blenda pressed her mother's hand to her lips, for now it was her turn to anticipate what was coming.

"Yes," continued Madame von Kühlen; "for ten long years after our marriage I constantly dreamt that God had heard our prayers, and blessed us with a sweet little daughter. And was not that dream fulfilled! After we had been married eleven years you came into the world; and from that moment, in spite of our poverty—for in this life there must always be some drawback—we grew happier every year, for we had our daughter, for whom to build castles in the air."

Blenda smiled, and anything sweeter than her smile it was impossible to imagine. It was like the reflection of an angel's glance in the dewy bosom of a rose.

At that moment, the sun, which was just sinking behind the hills, shed its golden radiance through the open window into the little chamber, glittering in Blenda's sunny locks, and playing like a glory around her marble brow. The dazzling beams compelled her to close her eyes, and as the transparent lids veiled their eloquent brightness, while the long silken lashes, in which a tear still glistened, rested upon her velvet cheek, her mother, standing at a little distance, gazed with a feeling of almost idolatrous delight on the lovely child; for Blenda could scarcely yet be considered a full-grown girl.

The sun disappeared behind the hills, and our heroine opened her deep blue eyes.

"What are you looking at thus, dear Mamma?"

"Oh, nothing—nothing. But we shall see whether my little Blenda will not live to drive about in her own carriage, with a magnificent coat of arms upon the panel. That is what I have seen in my dreams ever since you were born."

Blenda laughed outright. "Yes," said

she, "no doubt some great potentate will come to this retired spot to seek me."

"I do not go so far as to expect that any such person will come hither; but why should we remain here, now that we have nothing to bind us to the spot but our recollections of the past, which we can carry with us wherever we may be?"

"But whither should we go?" asked Blenda, in eager amaze—"and that sunbeam, of which you spoke to me, am I ever to see it?"

"Yes, my child; it is contained in this letter," and Madame von Kühlen drew forth the treasure from her bag, while Blenda looked on with eager eyes and a throbbing heart.

It was no wonder if her heart beat quick—it might be that the whole secret of her future destiny was contained in that letter, and Blenda was still young enough to hope a great deal from destiny.

CHAPTER II.

THE BOW IN THE CLOUD.

"In order that you may understand this letter, my child, some few words of explanation will be needed. Therefore listen to me!"

"I am all attention, Mamma."

"When you were born, your father and I were both much perplexed, for we thought there was a great deal in the choice of a name. I was very anxious that you should be called Concordia, after my grandmother, who had seen the world, and who had always been a distinguished and prosperous lady; but on this occasion—and I really believe it was the first and last time in all the years of our married life—Sweyn Göran was positively determined to have his own way, and that you should be christened Blenda."

"But is not Blenda a good name, Mamma!"

"Oh, no doubt; but between ourselves, that was a little bit of pride on the part of your dear father. God bless him! For you know his mother was not a lady, but a peasant girl of Wärend.* And he would often boast of the illustrious descent of the maid-

ens of Wärend, and say they were as good as any nobles in the land. An ancestress of your grandmother's had performed such great deeds, that she had gained the reputation of an Amazon, and a heroine, and what not; and to be sure I have nothing to say against her, for if there had been anything for grandmother to inherit, it would have been a fine thing for her, because it is owing to this very Blenda, that at Wärend, the daughters have a right to share equally with the sons. But she was poor, and in this respect precisely on a par with her husband."

"But, dearest mother, I cannot understand what all this has to do with that of which you were talking."

"Wait, and you will see. Your dear father used to call you Blenda, even before you were christened; for he said such a name would bring good luck, as well as confer honour. So I held my tongue, and took up with the name of your worthy grandmother, although I was fully persuaded that Concordia would have been the best; and when Sweyn saw that I held my tongue, and swallowed down my vexation, he was touched, and said: 'Well, let us split the difference, old woman,—Blenda Concordia let it be; but the child must be called Blenda.'"

"Poor papa—how good he was!"

"Yes, he was as good as gold; and I was soon satisfied . . . but if he had only lived till to-day, he would have seen that I was right."

"How so, mother?"

"Why this letter, which is likely to produce so great an effect upon our future fate, came yesterday, on the very day of St. Concordia. Does not that portend something, think you?" added Madame von Kühlen, with a significant smile, which showed how much value she attached to the omen.

"But if it came yesterday, why did you not tell me of it before?"

"Because I thought it best to reserve the hope and comfort which I had in store until the time when they should be most needed. Yesterday," continued the good woman, in a somewhat unsteady voice; "yesterday you could still sing your song of 'Sir Egbert' to your harpsichord, while to-day—what, crying again? Come, come, cheer up! Would you wish to have the harpsichord back again, if that were possible, knowing that even one of the trifling debts which your father has left would remain unpaid?"

"No, no, mother, I could never feel any pleasure in it if that were the case . . . but are you sure that the proceeds of the auction will suffice to cover them all?"

"Yes, thank God, for they were very trifling; but we have nothing left beyond the contents of this room. What we can get, however, by the sale of these, and of the great piece of linen which is just finished, will doubtless be sufficient to defray the cost of the journey which I have in contemplation."

"What! a journey!—you don't mean it!"

* Tradition relates that a heroine of the hundred of Wärend, in Småland, Blenda, by name, on occasion of an incursion of the Danes, when all the men of the hundred were absent, accomplished the destruction of the entire host, by means of a warlike stratagem. The date of this occurrence is uncertain, but it is supposed to have happened about 1154. In commemoration of this deed of prowess, the brides of the hundred of Wärend subsequently obtained the privilege of wearing a warrior's belt at their wedding, and being preceded on their way to church by military music, with fifes and trumpets; moreover the daughters were to divide, equally with the sons, the inheritance of their parents, while in all the rest of Sweden, the portion of a woman was the half of that of a man. Equal hereditary rights were not made general throughout the country until 1344.

—a real journey!"—and the word dried up, as if by magic, the last tear which glistened in Blenda's eyes. Her mother nodded.

"But tell me, when we have come to the end of our journey, what are we to do? or, rather, tell me first whither we are to travel."

"To good fortune!"

"But, dear mother, if that is all, one cannot set out upon the mere chance, trusting to the mercy of winds and waves."

"And why not? have we anything more secure to reckon upon here? It is true that I can weave cotton cloth, and you can embroider shirt fronts and handkerchiefs; but do you think that will be sufficient for our maintenance, when we are obliged to leave the allotment in the autumn? And, besides, who is to see you while we stay here?"

To this argument Blenda replied only by a modest blush.

"If your dear father had lived, of course we should have remained here as before; but now that he is gone, it becomes my duty to think for both of us."

"Well, and what have you thought of, mother?"

"Many things, my child; and one thing I determined to do, and did."

"What was that?"

"To write to my half-sister, Regina Sophia, at Stockholm. We were very good friends in our youth; and, although, when she married again—for her first marriage did not last more than a year—she came into a considerable fortune with her town councillor—and you know to be one of the council of such a town as Stockholm must be no small matter, although, to be sure, he was not a nobleman, like my husband—yet she never changed towards me, but used always to write to me every year, or every other year, until latterly, when the correspondence dropped."

"And did you apply to her?"

"Yes; for I said to myself, if she had died, she, who was so orderly in everything, would have taken care that the event should be made known to her own kith and kin. An announcement was sent to us in all due form when her second husband died. Captain Blücher had been lost at sea, for he was a sailor."

"Oh, never mind him now, dear Mamma. Well, you wrote—"

"Yes, I wrote, and told her what distress we were in, but that we thanked God with all submission that we were able to keep free from debt, and to look every body fearlessly in the face; and then I added, 'Dearest Regina Sophia! you who were always so wise,—cannot you give a good counsel to us poor women? My daughter, whose beauty is the least of her merits, is as industrious as any little bee, and I am, thank God, strong enough to work for two; therefore there could be no doubt of our own ability to get our livelihood, if we could only find some place to go to where there is work to be had, and payment to be got for it. And, my dear

sister, if you would, I am sure you could, help us in this matter.' I took good care not to say how I had always dreamed of good fortune and prosperity, if we could only reach the capital, for I recollect how often Regina Sophia had reproved me for my foolish and absurd fancies, as she was pleased to call them."

"And what reply does she make?"

"You may read it yourself."

Blenda took the letter with a trembling hand, and when she saw the stiff, upright handwriting, and read the formal commencement—"Sister Emerentia,"—she felt, however unwillingly, that the impression produced upon her mind was not an agreeable one. The letter was as follows:—

"While I deplore the loss you have experienced, I will not add to your grief by dwelling upon it; for in my own sorrows I never could endure vain attempts at consolation. I proceed, therefore, to the other matter of which your letter treats.

"I should be inclined to think that work could be as easily procured any where as in Stockholm; for most of those who come hither empty-handed find themselves far worse off than in the place from whence they came. Stockholm is a very expensive residence, and you might live, or rather starve, here for years without getting more work than would be worth a rix-dollar a week; for a good deal is required in order to become known, and that, my dear Emerentia, does not fall to the lot of every one."

"All this does not sound very encouraging," said Blenda, pausing and looking up in her mother's face.

"Read on." And Blenda continued:—

"If, however, you really are determined to act in all respects according to my advice, I should nevertheless,—although we are only half sisters, and so I might easily decline the embarrassments and perplexities which, unfortunately, are often the consequence of attempting to serve others—be disposed to advise you to bring your daughter with you, and come hither.

"It is not my intention to leave you in the street; you shall live with me in my house, No. — in Pilot Street, in Ladugardsland.* I have a very comfortable attic, which is vacant; and by means of my connexions—for, though not very extensive, I have some—I will take care that you shall not want for work.

"If this proposal meets your approval, you had better contrive to bring with you at any rate one or two barrels of butter, a ham, and some cheeses. Of course you can have no difficulty in procuring these articles; and here in Stockholm all kinds of provisions are very expensive.

"If you will let me know when and by what steamer you start, I will be in waiting for you when you arrive.

"My family are, thank God, quite well.

* The north-eastern suburb of Stockholm, in which the barracks are situated.

"With love to little Blenda, I remain, my dear Emerentia,

"Your affectionate and sincere friend,
"REGINA SOPHIA THORMAN."

"So we are to go and live in Stockholm!" exclaimed Blenda, letting the letter fall upon her lap.

"Yes, I was sure that would put you in good spirits. Do not you feel as if you could fly!"

"No, I cannot say that I do."

"What! are you not pleased?"

"My aunt's invitation is so cold,—so formal,—given in such a patronizing tone."

"My dear, if every thing were perfect from the very first, there would be nothing left to hope or to expect."

"That is very true; but—"

"Let us take care not to be unreasonable. Your aunt is a very benevolent woman, and doubtless means more kindly towards us than her words would seem to express: and even should she be a little proud, we have not much right to complain; she is in prosperity, and we have need of her patronage."

"And moreover," added Blenda, "she promises us plenty of work, so that we shall not be a burden upon her."

"Quite right, my dear; we may have our little pride as well. And then think of the treats we shall have when our work is over! In winter we will save our money to buy tickets for the theatre, once a month, or so. Only think, child, of our sitting in the Royal Opera-house at Stockholm! I can fancy I already see how pretty you will look in an elegant little silk bonnet, and how the people will stare at you. You know how often we have read of women who have attracted attention at the theatre."

"Oh, Mamma!"

"And think what a splendid sight it will be! The house crowded with people. . . . the whole of the Court to begin with, . . . and then the stage, with knights and ladies, moonlights and volcanoes, and all that they please to represent; the sea, the waves, horsemen, and horses, and chariots, and thunder and lightning—only think, child!"

Astonishment and delight were alternately depicted on Blenda's expressive countenance, as she eagerly listened to her mother's words.

"But what shall we do in summer?" asked she, as Madame von Kühlen paused to take breath.

"Oh, then we can have no end of enjoyment for nothing."

"For nothing?"

"To be sure! Your aunt's house is very near the Royal Park, which is very spacious and beautiful, and contains arbours, summer-houses, statues, flower-beds, and a beautiful *château*, in which the King and Queen, and all the Royal family dine, and people are allowed to look in through the windows and see them at dinner, and then there is the military band,

and carriages with ladies magnificently dressed, and *chasseurs* behind—and officers—just think, child!—riding on black or white horses—and crowds upon crowds of people, going on and on in a perpetual stream. There is a theatre there too—but I am not sure that one can go in without paying. And only fancy—Heaven help and defend us,—if it *were* to happen that the old King should die, and that we had the luck to see a royal funeral, and the coronation, and the nobles, and the pages, and the state horses, with the royal liveries."

"But it will be quite impossible for us to get there," sighed Blenda, who, now that she had at length fully comprehended the splendid prospect which her mother held out to her, began to consider the difficulties of the undertaking.

"Oh! as to that, you may rest satisfied that we *shall* get there, and that within a month."

Blenda uttered a loud exclamation; she could not believe her mother's words.

"The Deputy* and I have always been very good friends, and I will get him to sell the little we have left, after our departure. Meanwhile he will oblige us by advancing the money. I have no doubt I can persuade the good old man to do so."

"But the butter, and ham, and cheese?"

"Have we not got our cow, Black Rose, that I reared myself, and who must have supported us altogether, had we remained here? The constable's wife would give any thing to have her; and now that she can pay part of the price in kind, that matter will be easily settled. But she must pay a portion in ready money too, for we must buy new bonnets; and you must have a shawl, you cannot do without it; and, let me see—some nice new shoes and gloves, and a veil. Yes, yes, dear Blenda, people who travel by the steamboat must not be shabby; but Black Rose will help us out of all our troubles."

"You never are at a loss, dear Mamma. But, now, granting that we had reached our destination, there would still remain one insurmountable difficulty."

"Well, I should like to look that formidable difficulty in the face. What is it?"

"I think that two lone women, like ourselves, could not go to the theatre, or to the public promenades, without some one to escort us."

"Ah! I don't know about that exactly. I am very particular about propriety; but I should suppose that two gentlewomen would meet with respect and civility everywhere. Besides, I consider it to be the duty of his Majesty, as the first nobleman and gentleman in his dominions, to provide for the security of the poorer scions of the nobility but now I think of it, there is no difficulty at all."

"How so?"

* *Reichstagsmann*. A peasant who has once been deputed to attend the diet, always retains this title.

"My sister, Regina Sophia, has two sons, the one by her first, and the other by her second marriage; and these gentlemen, your cousins, will no doubt have the kindness to escort us. One of them is a linendraper."

"A linendraper!" repeated Blenda.

"Yes; it is not a very distinguished title, certainly, but that is quite the same to me; for, Heaven knows, I would not have you think of either of those gentlemen, even if they had ten houses—except, of course, in the way of friendship, as is befitting between relations."

"And my second cousin, dear Mamma!"

"Oh! he is the eldest, and Regina Sophia informs me that he is a hat-dresser," replied Madame von Kühlen, with a puzzled look.

"What is that, Mother!"

"My dear child, in the great world yonder, they have all sorts of names of which we know nothing here in the country. I hope it is a respectable and honourable line of business; and, indeed, I have no doubt of that, for Regina Sophia would never allow her son to undertake any other."

"Well, we shall see, Mother; it does sound rather odd. Meanwhile, there is an end of all chance of my sleeping either to-night, or for many nights to come."

CHAPTER III.

DREAMS, OLD AND NEW.

THE reader has doubtless already perceived that Madame von Kühlen was one of those fortunate people who always see everything *en couleur de rose*. Her character was a singular mixture of shrewdness and simplicity, self-conceit, pride, frankness and cheerfulness, no one of which qualities could attain so great a preponderance as to check the development of the rest. The only one she had which could be designated as all-powerful, was enthusiastic and sanguine hope, which now centred almost exclusively in the future fortunes of her daughter. This master passion unfortunately borrowed its materials from all the various characteristics above enumerated, and hence assumed the most variable hues.

Margaret Emerentia might, like her half-sister, Regina Sophia, have married a wealthy citizen, but her pride led her to prefer a poor nobleman; for, as she said, being herself a portionless damsel of noble birth, "like cleaves to like." . . . and, accordingly, her marriage turned out a very happy one; for she had the gratification of being called "my lady;" and so long as her husband lived, though there might occasionally be a deficiency of bread, and such other necessities, in their little household, yet hope never failed them, any more than did the energy and cheerfulness of Mrs. Margaret Emerentia; and however homely their style of living might be,

they never failed to unite with the minister and the commissary to defray the expense of an annual subscription to the nearest circulating library.

And when, after few days of intellectual fasting, a large parcel of books made its appearance, the eager inquiring faces of the mother and daughter, while the late worthy Ensign, with a prudent economy of pack-thread, carefully unpicked the knot, instead of cutting it, were a sight worth seeing; and when at length the treasures lay displayed, the two women could scarcely draw their breath for delighted curiosity.

"Have they sent the books we asked for, my dear?" would Madame von Kühlen inquire. "Have we got the 'Child of Nature,' and 'Arcadia,' and the 'Abandoned Infant!'"

"Yes, Mother; here they all are." And then the worthy Ensign would proceed to read the title-pages religiously through, down to the imposing words—printed by Lindle, in Orebro.

"And is there no romance of chivalry there, dear Father!" would Blenda timidly ask.

"Oh, yes; here is 'Rudolph of Werdenberg.'"

Thus all were satisfied; for while that which the father and mother most enjoyed were La Fontaine's sometimes humorous, sometimes pastoral, sketches of domestic life, Blenda's heart never beat so high as when her father read aloud, with his full-toned and expressive voice, the tales of chivalry, in which tournaments, mysterious heroes with vizors barred, and noble damsels glittering in silk and gold, figured in the foreground, while the background, was filled up with drawbridges, Gothic doors, the fearful *Vehmgericht* and its myrmidons, and, above all, those fascinating beings, yeleft troubadours, who so often proved to be a lover, or even a damsel errant, in disguise.

But whether the book treated of domestic life, or of the days of chivalry, the little family would become so absorbed in it—the women over their spinning-wheels, which appeared to whizz away of themselves, the Ensign over his pipe and in his capacity of reader—that the afternoon and the evening would fly away on the wings of the wind; and if, after this feast of soul, they had nothing better for the body than barley broth, what did that signify? "for," would the worthy housewife say—having however previously produced a piece of cold meat from the larder, for the head of the family—"we only eat to preserve life; and if we should come to have nothing better than oatmeal porridge, we need not be the less happy on that account."

It did not once enter the good woman's head to imagine that all this poetical and romantic food for the mind, administered moreover in such abundance, could by any possibility be injurious to her beloved Blenda. No; pages and troubadours, knights and ladies, might swarm unrestrained in Blenda's little head; and although this whole school of literature, together with that of La Fon-

taine and Kotzebue, with their strained and high-flown feelings, was already become somewhat superannuated, and all the rest of the world was in ecstasies over the new style introduced by Walter Scott, yet it was quite vain for the Waverley novels, with their plain common-sense, their admirable descriptions of natural scenes, and powerful, though to judge them by the old standard, rugged and unromantic sketches of character, to attempt to rival their predecessors in the favour of the inhabitants of the Ensign's allotment.

If the proprietor of the circulating library ever tried the experiment of sending one of the new and fashionable novels, Madame von Kühlen would write a polite request that he would spare them the infliction of such trash, which anybody who had ever seen mountains and lakes could just write as well. She paid her subscription in order to get books that were really worth reading; and if such were not supplied, why then, she was thankful to say, there was a circulating library at Wenersborg, as well as at Skara.

After this rebuke, they were never supplied with any books but such as the librarian, who was a friend to the progress, designated as old rubbish; and so it came to pass that the little family remained a fixture in that literary atmosphere which was the best adapted to its taste.

Among the romances which had exerted their influence over Blenda's youthful imagination, was one which gave her such especial delight, that her father had bought it and presented it to her on her birthday: and this *ne plus ultra* of interesting works was entitled, "Bertha and Agnes, or Love and Pride."

The proud Bertha and tender Agnes were both attached to Sir Egbert of Montabor, and Sir Egbert shone upon them both "like a star," as the song has it; for he paid the homage of his admiration to the proud and high-souled Bertha; but his heart was with the loving and gentle Agnes, who trembled at his prowess, while Bertha continually urged him on to brave fresh perils.

This tale was a cause of great perplexity and indecision to Blenda. At one moment she fancied herself wandering, like Agnes, amidst flowery meads, surrounded by birds and lambskins; the next she was riding, like Bertha, in masculine disguise to her lover's camp, and doing violence to the modesty of her sex, in order to purchase the privilege of remaining a few hours in his tent; then again she would ascend the hill to the castle of Agnes, in the semblance of a troubadour, harp in hand, to sing of the heroic deeds of Sir Egbert, for the purpose of moving Agnes to the betrayal of her feelings, whereby Bertha was to be enabled to judge of the truth of the rumour which had reached her, that Sir Egbert, her affianced lover, had become attached to the daughter of the widow whose rights he had, at the instigation of Bertha, drawn his sword to defend.

"Oh!" would Blenda say to herself, "they really are both so enviable, that I do not

know which I should best like to be . . . perhaps, after all, I should choose to be Agnes," added she, blushing . . . "only not quite such a timid dove." Agnes became in the end the wife of Sir Egbert.

But when in the evening twilight she sat down to her harpsichord, she felt herself once more transformed into the high-spirited Bertha, who in the disguise of a troubadour visited Agnes's castle and sang:—

With all the fire of chivalry
The German warrior's heart throbs high;
From sea to sea, from strand to strand,
Waves his banner, gleams his brand—
But Egbert, like the morning star,
Outshines all German heroes far.

The German heroes' deathless fame,
Full many a minstrel's lays proclaim;
But Egbert brave excels them all,
In battle-field, or festal hall,
Transcendent as the star of even,
Above the paler stars of heaven.

The love of every German knight
Is true as steel, as diamond bright;
And love like this shall well repay
The modest faith of German May;
But like a star all stars above,
Shines Bertha bless'd with Egbert's love.

Such was our young heroine's life at home. Her time was divided between her work, her day-dreams, her harpsichord, her doves, and her flower-beds, which last afforded her as much delight as ever the hanging gardens of Babylon did to Queen Semiramis. Moreover, Blenda had devised how a terrace, six yards long and four yards wide, might be constructed on a ledge of rock jutting out from the side of the hill, and with the assistance of the servant girl and the cowboy, she had conveyed the earth thither, and planted it with flowers. All this was more than sufficient to afford perfect happiness to one so young and innocent as Blenda.

This peaceful and happy life was, at length, interrupted by the illness of her father, after which, as we know, there was nothing but gloom, confusion, and despondency until the evening on which Madame von Kühlen unfolded before her daughter's eyes that vast map of the future upon which so many different paths crossed or intermingled with each other.

As Blenda had prophesied, there was but little sleep for her that night, and when she did close her eyes it was only to indulge in dreams still more confused and diversified than her waking ones. The subjects of these dreams were, however, quite new.

Sometimes she fancied herself at the theatre, while a gentleman of distinguished appearance, and his bosom covered with orders, leaned over the back of her chair; at others, she was walking in the royal park, very fashionably dressed, followed by a servant in livery, and beside her a noble and chivalrous form, whose eye seemed eager to ascertain her slightest wish; or bowling along in a half-reclining posture in a luxurious carriage, until, lastly, she found herself in an elegant and mysterious boudoir,

waiting until the door should be opened by her maid, who had received instructions to admit an individual with his eyes blindfolded.

In short, poor Blenda was quite bewildered by the contemplation of all the various parts which she would doubtless be called upon to play in the great world, in which, as she believed, so many rivals of the proud Knight of Montabor were prepared to contend with each other for some token of her favour.

Of course, before all this came to pass, it was a necessary part of the story that they must encounter a life of great trial and privation; but if all ended well (and of that there could, of course, be no doubt), it would surely be very easy to put up with a few introductory hardships.

Our heroine, nevertheless, be it known, was by no means silly; she had, on the contrary, a clear head and a good understanding, and if she was deficient in that species of tact and knowledge of the world, which can only be acquired by living in it, she was by no means wanting in those qualities which would enable her easily to acquire it. But, owing to her naturally lively imagination, the romantic studies which had formed so large a portion of her education, had become so completely part and parcel of herself, that she believed nothing to be *impossible*, although her faith in chance and circumstance was not quite so unbounded as was that of her mother.

Add to this that Madame von Kühlen was constantly repeating to her that she, Blenda, was more lovely than all the heroines of romance of whom she had ever read; and when, in order to ascertain the truth of this assertion, Blenda consulted her looking-glass, it certainly did occur to her to think that possibly her mother might not be altogether wrong: and with some secret pleasure and much childish simplicity she would gaze at the bewitching image therein reflected with a bright sweet smile, which seemed to say, "We shall see what will come of it."

Blenda's greatest charm, however, was her pure and guileless heart, so full of kind feeling that she would readily sacrifice not only her day dreams, but her favourite indulgence of reading novels, in order to afford all the assistance in her power to any one who might be in distress; and this assistance consisted not only in care, attendance, and general kindness, but extended itself to the fabrication, in secret, of many little articles of fancy-work, the proceeds of the sale of which were destined for the relief of persons poorer than herself. And when those she had thus assisted deemed that an angel from heaven had come to their aid, Blenda would smile a really angelic smile, and think that, after all, there was nothing in this world so delightful as the power of affording assistance and consolation to others.

* * * *

"Will you never wake, my 'sleeping

beauty!'" said Madame von Kühlen, as she stroked the rosy cheek of her daughter.

"Oh, mother, how I have slept! and what dreams I have had!" and Blenda extended her arms to her mother, and concealed her glowing countenance on her bosom.

"Yes, yes, I dare say; . . . but now listen to what I have already done to-day. I have been both to the Deputy and to the Constable's wife."

"Well—I hardly dare ask the result."

"Cannot you see that in my face! Everything is settled. The Deputy will advance us the money for our journey. 'It would be a sin and a shame,' he said, (honest man!) 'if I were to refuse to help two lone women, and particularly now that their prospects are so good, since their relation has offered to receive them.'"

"Thank Heaven! so it really will come to pass?"

"Undoubtedly it will. The Deputy will drive us over to Wenersborg himself; and as soon as I have spoken to the Commissary about taking our places, and the day is fixed, I will write to Regina Sophia that she may come and meet us on our arrival, strangers as we shall be."

There was a brief pause. Madame von Kühlen was not prepared for it; she had expected an outburst of delight, and of admiration of her own energy and activity.

"Do you not trust my words, child? Do you not believe in your own happiness?"

"Yes, I believe in it all; but . . . forgive me, dear Mamma." And Blenda folded her hands together, with a touching expression of sorrow and anxiety, and looked up in her mother's face, her eyes glistening with tears.

"My dear child, what is the matter?"

"Mother, I am afraid."

"Afraid? afraid of what? when you are under the protection of God and of your mother."

"It is of myself that I am afraid."

Madame von Kühlen looked rather perplexed. "What do you mean?" said she.

"I do not know what has come over me, but I am not what I used to be. Yesterday evening I forgot four things, and I have never remembered them till just this minute."

"Well, let me hear what they were. Your head was so full, my poor child, that you could not think of everything."

"O yes, I could think of some things well enough. I had such—such *proud* dreams! both sleeping and waking. And then—but I am really ashamed to think of it. All this cannot be right, since it has already made me do so very wrong."

"Come, I am still waiting for your confessions."

"In the first place, this was the very first evening, from early spring to late autumn, that it ever happened to me to forget to water my flowers."

"Oh, you little goose! is that all?"

"But was not it wrong of me to forget my poor flowers, which have given me so

much pleasure for so many years, and which I had reared, and taken care of, and watched so long, in hope and fear, and that for the sake of a new idea not yet an hour old?"

"I think it was very pardonable, however, that *such* an idea should take precedence of your flower-bed."

"Then," continued the self-accuser, with stronger emphasis, "I forgot to feed my doves. Do you think that was pardonable too?"

"At any rate, no harm was done; for I saw Lisa go and feed them."

"But that is no thanks to me. And, oh, there is worse yet to come!"

"What is it?"

"You know I go every Tuesday and Saturday afternoon to Jonsängen, to poor old Britta, who is quite solitary and a cripple, and whose only pleasure it is to see me come to her with my little basket; and yesterday she was deprived of it."

"Well, then, she will be all the more delighted to see you to-day, and will enjoy the anticipation of the good things that are in store for her; and that she may have reason to do so, we will take a piece of bacon, and put it in the basket."

Blenda shook her head, and this gesture, together with the slight sigh which heaved her bosom, plainly showed that she did not feel comforted.

"I have not yet told all," continued she in a low voice.

"Well, now for the fourth thing."

"I forgot to say my prayers, and went to bed without asking God's blessing."

"I asked it for you, my child—and I feel sure that our merciful Father will forgive you this omission, which was caused by delight at your great and unexpected good fortune."

"But," objected the young girl in a tone of voice expressive not only of sorrow but of some alarm, "it cannot be right to give ourselves up to a happiness which causes us to forget all our former pleasures and duties, and even our prayers, even God himself. Such a state makes me tremble."

"Calm yourself, my child: you are young and excitable, but I know you better than you know yourself, and this I solemnly assure you, that you will never forget either your God or your duties, although, like other sinful mortals (for you know we cannot set up for being perfect), there may be moments of great excitement in which your better feelings may for a time lose their power in some degree."

"You think then?"

"That you will feel your peace of mind restored when once you have rectified all your little omissions, and that you will then be the first to revert to the subject of our journey."

"At any rate," replied Blenda, "I will first make what arrangements I can to provide for all that I must leave behind."

"You mean your flowers, your doves, and poor old lame Britta."

"Yes."

"They will be easily made. As to your flowers, Andrew Peterson, who will obtain the allotment next autumn, has a nice little daughter—Christina—and that she may undertake with a good will the task of taking care of them, which after all will be for her own pleasure, you can give her your yellow check handkerchief, which is perhaps rather too faded for you to wear at Stockholm, and if besides that we make her a present of the little pasteboard box, with the smelling-bottle, I am sure she will think herself amply repaid for her trouble."

"Many thanks, dear Mamma; yes, Christina shall certainly have them, and besides I will ask it as such a favour, that I am sure she will be kind to my poor flowers, . . . but the doves?"

"We will give them to the Deputy's wife, she has got doves of her own, so they will have plenty both of food and of company. And then if we should find when we get to Stockholm that we could manage to keep them, your pets will still be there, and we should only have to send for them."

"Oh, that is delightful—even the hope of some day seeing them again lightens my heart, and makes me feel so happy, . . . now there is only poor Britta to be thought of."

"For the sake of that good old woman, who is so attached to you, you shall work half an hour longer every day, than would otherwise be necessary. These half hours will in time produce a nice little sum, which you can send every month to your old friend in a letter, which I am sure the minister will be very glad to read to her."

Blenda threw herself into her mother's arms; she did not utter a word, but the language of her eyes was eloquent enough. And when she had paid the requisite visits, and appeased the stings of her tender conscience, she was, as her mother had foretold, the first to revert to the subject of the great events, which could not fail to result from the new prospects opening before her.

We will now pass over an interval of three weeks, during which the thoughts of the two ladies were entirely occupied with the necessary preparations for their departure. We shall find them again after the lapse of that period at Wenersborg, the first halting-place on their journey.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SCANIAN COUNT.

THE second of July, 1832, was the memorable day from which our heroine dated the commencement of her new life, for it was on this day that she and her mother reached Wenersborg in excellent preservation in the Deputy's little two-horse carriage, which contained besides, a not *very* well filled trunk,

in company with two casks of butter, some cheeses, and a ham, all carefully packed under a covering of sack-cloth.

With the exception of a few visits to Skara, Blenda had never before been in a town; but she had read so much about towns, and had lived in them so much in imagination, that she did not now feel in the least bewildered.

Moreover, Wenersborg was only a provincial town, and so could not be looked upon with any great respect by people whose destination was the Capital.

It was about two o'clock in the afternoon, they had eaten their dinner just before reaching the town, and as the steamer was not expected to arrive until seven or eight o'clock, Madame von Kühlen purposed to employ the interval in the purchase of the articles which were destined to set off Blenda's beauty to the best advantage, and also to make her own appearance a little more creditable.

As to the state of the two ladies' spirits at this important juncture, candour compels us to confess that in the case of neither were they quite so high as when we last parted from them. Not that Madame von Kühlen ever doubted even for a moment that *in the end* all would turn out to admiration, or that Blenda looked forward with any anxious misgivings to the life of constant and ceaseless work which lay before her—for that would, of course, be varied by no end of unexpected incidents and events. No; it was the pain of bidding farewell to the grave of the departed husband and father—of quitting the little home in which they had spent so many happy years—that, added to the stormy weather which had lasted ever since the preceding night, had depressed their spirits, especially as they durst not hope to prove themselves heroines on the water.

The Deputy had proposed to his two former neighbours to go to the inn which he habitually frequented, but Madame von Kühlen was too anxious for the maintenance of her dignity to assent to such a proposal.

A lady of noble birth, coming with her daughter from a common public house! such a thing was not to be thought of. If the company on board the steamer should see it, none of them would trouble themselves to show any civility to the new comers.

No, they must be able to say that they had come from the *hotel*, and a cup of coffee, ordered for the sake of appearances, was all that they would require; for the Commissary had told them that they would have nothing to pay for the room they occupied unless they slept in it.

The little carriage accordingly stopped before the door of the Deputy's inn, and there deposited their luggage, which the worthy man promised to convey on board the steamer; and then, being well acquainted with the town, he first took the ladies to a milliner's, where they provided themselves with new bonnets, and then to the hotel, where they were shown into a room on the

first floor, close to the great ball-room, which would doubtless never have been offered them if they had made their appearance in their old cloaks and grey checked cotton bonnets. But Blenda looked so fascinating in her new and well-fitting mourning dress, with her little fashionable straw bonnet and flowing black veil, her soft fair curls falling so gracefully over her cheeks, that no one could resist the influence of her charms, which was still further increased when she spoke, by the sweet and melodious tones of her voice.

Moreover, the title of the two strangers did not escape the ears of the waiting-maid, when the Deputy said, "Your Ladyship and the young Lady will hear from me when the steamer arrives," at the same time bowing a kindly farewell, in return for which the mother and daughter shook hands with him cordially.

The ladies were now left alone to wait for their coffee; after drinking which, they purposed going out into the town, in order to convert the last remnant of the price paid for poor Black Rose—the once beloved and only cow of Madame von Kühlen—into a handkerchief, shoes, and some crape, seeing that as yet they had only modernised their head-gear.

"Well, my child, we have at any rate made a beginning, thank God," said Madame von Kühlen, as she turned out and inspected the contents of her bag. "I should like to know who are the other guests staying here. Did you notice the good-looking young man who was standing at the door as we came in?"

"And who looked so hard at me, that I really could not make out what he was like?" enquired Blenda, simply.

"Yes, he seemed to devour you with his eyes;—but that I am not surprised at; I was sure, beforehand, that you would no sooner set your foot out of doors than you would be noticed. I wish I knew who he was! Let me see if I have got everything right here, . . . comb . . . pomatum pot . . . needle-book . . . emery pincushion . . . He had quite a distinguished air, though he was very dark . . . black and white thread . . . tape . . . my spectacles . . . Goodness! that roll of riband that I so particularly wanted, must be in the trunk—"

"So you thought his complexion very dark, did you, mother?" asked Blenda, with some curiosity.

"I tell you that I have forgotten my roll of riband, and that I must have it—you know yourself where my bows are missing, you sewed them on so badly, you little careless thing . . . Well, I know how I can manage; we will go out together, and when we have bought the shawl, I can just run round to the inn while you choose the shoes and the crape, . . . and then we can meet at the right-hand corner of the market-place."

The appearance of the chamber-maid with the coffee interrupted these confidential communications.

"This is a very handsome hotel!" began our inquisitive lady, with an encouraging glance at the maid; "I suppose there are a great many travellers here?"

"Oh yes; I may say we have a great number."

"That I was sure of—probably, for the most part, people of rank?"

"Oh, of all kinds."

"Is there any one in the next room?—all seems so quiet."

"There?—yes, that is occupied by Count C—creutz, a very rich man, who has two rooms for himself here, and one below for his servant. If you hear nothing of him now, it must be either that he is gone out, or that he is taking a nap."

"An elderly man then, I suppose?"

"No, indeed! He is young and handsome too; but smart young gentlemen sometimes take a nap in the daytime, as well as others, especially when they have been up nearly all night at the gambling table, like this young Scanian Count."

"What delicious clear coffee, and what excellent biscuits! . . . Is the young Count dark or fair?"

"Well, nobody could find fault with him for being too fair—hair, eyes, and complexion are all as dark as night—but there seems to be nothing else dark about him—he is gay enough."

"And an officer, no doubt?"

"I really don't know—he is dressed like other people, only all his things are very handsome."

The girl now looked as if she thought that she had said more than enough to satisfy the curiosity of the ladies, and she was about to leave the room, when Blenda, who had been standing silently at the window, turned round, and inquired gently, "Who else have you in the hotel?"

"Oh, we have no end of quality—a Russian (they say he is a prince), and two Englishmen, and a whole lot of gentlemen and ladies, who are going by the steamer to Stockholm." And having given this comprehensive information, the busy waiting-maid disappeared.

Madame von Kühlen felt herself quite oppressed by *l'embarras des richesses*. She was firmly persuaded that not only the Russian Prince, and the two "English Lords" (for less than Lords they could not be, and it was possible that they might be Dukes) but also the rich young Scanian Count, would all fall in love with Blenda, if they could only see her—and their doing so depended entirely upon whether by extreme good luck they should all be going by the steamer . . . When she had reached that point, her hopes became so sanguine as almost to take away her breath.

"You are very silent, Mamma! what are you thinking of?"

"My child, I am reflecting. I remember reading the description of a castle, of which the apartments were cased in the purest marble, and adorned with fountains and the

most beautiful flowers, and of which the architecture was so singular, that it appeared to be the work of enchantment—and I think—but I cannot exactly recollect—that there were three or four hundred rooms in the castle."

"Oh yes, I know; it was a Moorish castle."

"I know it was—but what is the harm of that? A Moorish Prince may be every bit as good as a Russian Prince, and has just as good a right to travel to see the world as any English Peer, or German Duke . . . There are a great many Dukes in Germany, and of course they cannot always stay at home—such people frequently travel incognito!"

"That is very possible, dear Mamma; but there are no Moorish Princes to travel now. Ah, I well remember how I cried when I read of their expulsion from Spain! I am sure they never came back again. No, there are no Moorish Princes now!"

"Well, but there are Spanish Grandees, dear Blenda, there is no doubt of that; Don Juans, and Don Sebastians, and names like that. My grandmother who had seen the world, once met with no less than three Spaniards."

"But, dear Mother, what in the world has put it into your head to think of Moors and Spaniards just now that we are going out to make our purchases?"

"Oh, one cannot account for one's thoughts; they will wander. All I can say is, that it is not impossible that, now that we are on our travels, we may happen to fall in with one or the other . . . But it is high time for us to think of your purchases, and of my roll of riband. Come, put on your bonnet, and don't look too steadily at the pavement as you go along."

"At the pavement?"

"Oh—you understand!"

"Not in the least."

"Then listen: modesty is the greatest ornament a woman can have; but she ought not to appear either sly or affected, and should be able to look any one who looks at her frankly and fearlessly in the face. I would not for the world have people say: 'Look, there goes a little country girl!'"

"But, dear Mamma!"

"Hush, my child! I am far from meaning that you should give encouragement to any one to pursue you even with their eyes; but I mean that if an opportunity should present itself of making a desirable acquaintance, you should be quite natural and like yourself. You need not fear lest any one should take liberties with you—of that you may be satisfied; for you look just as determined as I did in my youth."

"Very well, Mamma; all I wish is to be quite natural—so I shall behave just as I think best at the time, if such an opportunity as you suppose should really occur."

"That is right; and now come, I do not think I look so much amiss either, provided only that the weather remains fine, and that

we are not obliged to put on our travelling cloaks!"

At the very moment that the mother and daughter opened the door of their room, an individual entered the hall by the opposite door—and this was no other than the dark young man who had been standing at the door of the hotel when they arrived.

As in crossing the extensive hall he passed the ladies, he bowed respectfully, and once more his gaze rested upon Blenda with an expression which, this time, revealed not only curiosity, but also a certain degree of interest.

Hasty as was the glance they exchanged, at least on the part of Blenda, it sufficed to imprint the features of the young man upon her memory. He was not indeed handsome, according to Blenda's notions of a handsome man—namely, a youth of almost superhuman beauty, a second edition of Sir Egbert of Montabor—but in his manly countenance, as well as in his whole appearance, there was so much of kindness, something so prepossessing and attractive, that it was impossible not to feel its influence.

When the ladies reached the threshold, it was more than they could do to abstain from looking round. They saw the stranger enter the room next to their own.

"Oh! the Count!" whispered Blenda.

"I was sure of that before," replied Madame von Kühlen: "such a tall noble figure, such ease of manner could only belong to a real nobleman."

"What a kind expression there is in his dark eyes; but he is not so very young."

"Well, upon my word! Why, he cannot be near thirty yet."

On the stairs they met another stranger whom they had not yet seen—an officer, who was calling aloud to a waiter—

"Hallgrén, is the Count at home?"

"Yes, lieutenant, be so kind as to walk up-stairs."

Madame von Kühlen took very little notice of the lieutenant, although that which he took of the ladies was tolerably marked.

"How pleasant it is for us, dear Blenda," said she, "to have ascertained for certain that the dark young man was the Count himself."

CHAPTER V.

THE FIRST CHAPTER OF THE ROMANCE.

THE purchases were all made, and with the new shawl hanging over her arm, the new shoes wrapped up in her pocket-handkerchief, and a piece of the new crape hastily tied over her bonnet, Blenda, who was first at the rendezvous, appeared at the right hand corner of the market-place waiting for her mother.

Ten minutes elapsed, and still Madame von Kühlen was nowhere to be seen.

"Perhaps," said Blenda to herself, "I had better go and look for her. I should have no difficulty in finding my way. But no, I think it would be wiser for me to remain here, for if she were to take a different road we might miss each other."

Our heroine now began to walk up and down the street along which she had just come, amusing herself by examining the houses on either side with great minuteness, when suddenly her attention was arrested by the pleasant tone of a voice behind her, saying, "I beg your pardon, but have you not lost your way?"

Blenda turned hastily around. Some presentiment assured her that the voice belonged to the same young man whom she had already twice met—and she was not mistaken.

"No, thank you, I am waiting for my mother!" replied she, without embarrassment, for she already felt in some degree acquainted with her interlocutor—at least she knew who he was, although, as he had not introduced himself, she did not of course address him by his title.

"I hope," continued he, "that you will forgive the liberty I have taken in accosting you, for my impression that you had lost your way, and my desire to be of service to you, made me unmindful of all other considerations."

"I should be very ungrateful were I to take amiss so natural an act of courtesy. I should undoubtedly have done the same myself, had I believed that I saw any one losing their way."

A slight smile played around the stranger's well-formed mouth; and for a moment he seemed to hesitate, doubtless between the wish to continue the conversation, and the fear of attracting the attention of the passers by to his young companion. Which of these two feelings would have obtained the victory, it is difficult to say, had not Blenda herself, perfectly unsuspecting of the scruples of delicacy which restrained her companion, solved the question by saying with the most perfect simplicity, that she supposed they should be travelling companions as far as Stockholm.

"No," replied he, "I shall not be so fortunate. I am travelling in the contrary direction."

"To Scania!"

"Why should you fix upon Scania?"

Blenda coloured crimson. She had unwittingly betrayed the knowledge she had acquired concerning him.

"I do not know," replied she, with some little embarrassment, "I hear that there are many travellers going in that direction; . . . but tell me, are voyages by water very tedious and disagreeable?"

"They certainly are so sometimes; but the voyage you are about to take is a very pleasant and interesting one, provided the weather be favourable; and if you provide yourself with some pleasant entertainment in the way of reading, you will find it very

tolerable even if neither your fellow-passengers nor the weather should prove to be exactly all that you could wish."

"Pleasant reading? I am sorry to say I have but one book, and I have read that so often that I almost know it by heart."

"It is then some favourite author—Walter Scott, perhaps, or Cooper, or Bulwer?"

"No, none of those."

"Is it by chance Eugene Sue?"

"Not that either. The book is by La Fontaine."

"La Fontaine!" repeated the stranger in a tone which clearly implied: "Where can you have come from not to know that for ages La Fontaine has been mouldering in the dust of oblivion?"

Blenda understood him perfectly, and burst into a hearty fit of laughter as she replied, "I have come from the wilds, I confess, and although my father was a scion of a noble and distinguished house—at least he used to say that the Von Kühlen were a very old family—we lived a perfectly patriarchal life, and you must therefore not be surprised if you find that we are far behind the age in many other things besides literature."

"If I am surprised, my dear young lady, it is certainly not at that."

"So much the better—then you have only to imagine that you have fallen in with a damsel of some past century. . . . But look—there is my mother at last coming along the street on the other side of the market-place."

"I will then bid you farewell, Lady Agnes!—that was, I believe, a favourite name in those days?"

"And why not Bertha? that name was at least as much admired, Sir Knight of the closed Vizor! . . . you know that was the method of concealment adopted by all knights who did not wish to make themselves known."

"I am unfortunately very imperfectly acquainted with the laws of chivalry; but unless I am much mistaken, their closed vizors did not debar them from contending for the prize of the tournament, and I believe it was their custom to wear secretly or openly some token exhibiting the colours of the lady of their choice, a glove, a riband, or something of the kind, which proved a more effectual charm than either shield or helmet to preserve them from danger," and as the young stranger uttered these words he raised his hands and displayed a knot of black riband.

Blenda cast down her eyes, and perceived with astonishment that the black bow which had fastened her collar, had disappeared.

She looked up, blushing, and in painful confusion. She could not find words to ask how this had happened, but she felt oppressed by the fear, lest in her ignorance of the ways of the world, she might have gone too far with this stranger. Was this an affront offered to her? Did he take her for a girl at whose expense he might amuse himself at his pleasure? Her pride revolted at

the thought—she would have spoken, but her voice failed her: she could scarcely restrain her tears.

With looks of sincere, one might almost have said affectionate sympathy, the stranger had followed every variation of the expressive countenance which revealed her thoughts to him as plainly as her lips could have spoken them, and it was in a tone of deep respect, mingled with kindness, that he resumed:

"Do not be uneasy, Mademoiselle von Kühlen. He who has now enjoyed the privilege of conversing with you for a few moments, will not show himself unworthy of your kindness. Were he a friend, a relation, he might perhaps venture to add a word of counsel—but as it is, that would be presuming too far."

"No, pray let me hear it. I am young; I have never seen anything of the world; my mother and I are quite alone, and I am sure you mean kindly by me."

"Since that is indeed your opinion, I will permit myself to prove to you that you do me no more than justice; nothing however but the interest, the respect I feel for you, could justify me in giving you such a counsel. . . . Do not be too frank in your acceptance of the courtesies which will not fail to be offered to you. Youth and beauty, especially if without a male protector, are compelled, in self-defence, to use a little caution. And now farewell, my dear young lady; may your journey be a prosperous one!"

And before Blenda could utter a single word in reply, her friendly counsellor had disappeared.

A few minutes later, the mother and daughter had rejoined each other; but instead of asking any explanation of the interview she had witnessed, or of Blenda's evident agitation, Madame von Kühlen only said:—

"Come, my dear, make haste; let us begin by getting home."

It was evident that the good lady was, so to say, bursting with some secret.

At length they got up-stairs, crossed the hall, and reached the parlour.

"Shut the door, Blenda," said Madame von Kühlen.

"Oh! Mamma, I know what you are going to say; you are astonished at seeing me in conversation with the Count."

"Astonished! not in the least. I was quite prepared for something of the kind. But were *you* not astonished at my being away so long?"

"Yes, indeed. What was it that detained you?"

"First tell me how you and the Count happened to meet, and then all that passed between you, word for word."

Blenda did as she was desired; and Madame von Kühlen nodded her approval of all and everything.

"Well, my child, now you see whether I was mistaken. No sooner do we begin to see a little of life, than we meet with an adventure the very first thing! Do you think

anything of the kind would ever have happened, if we had stayed at home from July to eternity?"

"No, certainly not."

"But, you see, he wishes to remain incognito;—well, there is no harm in that. And his advice, which was very well meant, but otherwise quite unnecessary, is evidently to be ascribed to—you understand?"

"No, I do not. What do you mean?"

"I mean that it is to be ascribed to jealousy—to fear lest you should encourage and accept the homage of some one else; that is very easy to understand."

Blenda shook her head: "I think his motive was a much better one. Besides, he did not say one word about our meeting again."

"Why, what should he have said about it? That is a self-evident thing."

"Then, dear Mamma, you really think—"

"I tell you that he fell in love with you from the first moment that he saw you. And do you know what?"

Blenda was silent of course.

"The Deputy had something to tell me, and it was that which detained me so long."

"The Deputy! What could he possibly have to say that had any reference to the Count?"

"That you shall hear directly. When he left us, the gentleman who had been standing at the door when we arrived was still there,—he was the Count, you know—"

"Yes."

"So when the Deputy went out, he asked him who the two ladies were; and when he had been told—"

"What then?"

"He exhibited such evident surprise and pleasure that old Lawrence, in his simplicity, asked him whether he was acquainted with us. Of course the Deputy did not understand that the cause of this surprise and pleasure was, that the Count could not possibly have expected to hear that we were of noble birth. Meanwhile he made himself very familiar with the Deputy, who was not a little proud when I told him that it was a wealthy Scanian Count with whom he had been walking down the street; for you must know that he walked along with the old man, while he extracted from him everything that he had to tell about us. So I felt quite sure that after hearing so much good of you from the Deputy,—for, thank God, he has nothing but good to say,—he would be sure to take the very first opportunity of becoming personally acquainted with you. But, at any rate, we must take our time; it would never do not to have a little breathing space before we are overwhelmed with admirers."

"Dear Mamma, pray do not talk like that—I should be so afraid that we might make ourselves ridiculous in some way or other."

"Ridiculous! well, upon my word. . . Do you think I do not know what I am about? . . . I shall begin to be rather anxious however, now, if the steamer does not

soon make its appearance. I enquired of a great many people on my way from the inn, and they all told me that the boat must have been detained by storms and contrary winds, but that it would no doubt be here soon."

"Heaven forbid that it should be otherwise—we have made all our purchases, and now we have nothing left."

"Very true; it is in vain that I have turned my bag inside out, twenty times; I can find nothing there except the sum destined to pay for our meals on board the steamer. And we could not think of asking Regina Sophia to lend us some money immediately on our arrival."

"Dear Mamma, I am afraid we did very wrong to buy all these things.—Only think if the steamer should not arrive, and we should be obliged to spend the night here—we should have to pay for two beds and for a little supper, for we should certainly be hungry—"

"I am hungry already, my dear—but there is nothing to be gained by losing heart.—You could not do without the shawl, for the one which the minister's wife lent you for your journey hither, must be sent back by the Deputy. And the bonnet, shoes, and veil, were equally indispensable. Ought not you to look like other people—now that I have sold Black Rose, too?"

"Well, but suppose we should have to spend the night here!"

"No matter—we will say we are afraid to go to bed lest we should not be able to get ready in time—"

"Even if that could be done, think what a bad effect it will have, if we do not ask for anything."

"Never mind what effect it has. If the steamer has not come in by nine o'clock, we will take a walk, in order to see if there is any prospect of it—and then it may be supposed that we have drank tea out."

"We shall not have enjoyed it much!" said Blenda, laughing.

"My dear—how discontented you are!"

"So I am,—but when one is hungry—"

"Well, then, we must even break into the rixdollar which I had reserved to pay for the attendance on board the steamer—for I had rather do anything than touch a farthing of the money destined for our meals!"

"Well, then, I suppose I must examine my bag!" said Blenda, taking it up; and after fumbling in it for a few minutes, she drew forth in triumph a two-dollar note.

"My goodness, child, what is the meaning of this? Why, I myself made the bargain of the shawl and shoes, so that you might have a trifle over for gloves and perfume."

"Nevertheless, here we have two rixdollars, so the stewardess on board the packet may have her dollar."

"But I cannot conceive—"

"Do you think, dear Mamma, that nobody else can be generous besides the Provost and Commissary, who gave you all that we should require for our fare on board? When I took

leave of the minister the kind good old man gave me these two dollars, and whispered to me, 'My child, it is so little, that I give it to you for yourself.'"

"Well, only see if fortune does not always befriend us! Now I will order tea at once, and we will have quite a feast, and by the time we have finished no doubt we shall hear the gun, and the steamer will come in."

Unfortunately, however, such was not the case.

The tea had long been finished, and the two poor ladies directed their attention alternately to the window, and to the door which led to the Count's chamber, where now all was still, and trembled lest the waiting-maid should come to make the beds. At last she did come with bedding for two beds upon her arm, and it was with a look of no small contempt that she turned up her nose at Madame von Kühlen's explanation that they durst not undress.

"Why," said she, "it will be no worse for you, Ma'am, than for all the other travellers in the hotel."

"That is of no consequence," replied Madame von Kühlen, colouring and rather provoked; "I suppose we may please ourselves."

"Oh, to be sure, so far as I am concerned," replied the chambermaid, in the impertinent tone which such people often assume when they have discovered what sort of persons, according to their ideas, they have to deal with.

"How humiliating!" whispered Blenda, when they were once more alone.

At that moment a noise was heard in the hall: it was their neighbour coming home.

"Will you please to take anything, Sir?" asked the waiting-maid, in a very different tone.

"Nothing," was the short reply; and the Count entered his room—not, however, that adjoining the one occupied by the ladies.

The waiting-maid stayed in the hall, and was presently joined by some one else. Madame von Kühlen was not superior to the weakness of listening to catch as much as she could of their conversation.

"How very short the Count speaks this evening!" said the girl.

"Do you think so, Miss Christina?" replied a man's voice. "I did not observe anything unusual about him. Perhaps he was tired of spying and searching after——"

Madame von Kühlen could not see the gesture which accompanied these words, or else she would have perceived a hand extended in the direction of her own door.

"Aha!" resumed Christina, "then he had heard of our little beauty."

"The Lieutenant met her on the stairs, and the alarm was given at once. But I think ——" (here several words were spoken too low to reach the ears of Madame von Kühlen) "—— put them upon a false scent."

A voice was now heard calling Christina, and so the conversation ended.

"There certainly is nothing like travelling!" ejaculated Madame von Kühlen.—"But I don't know what I would not give

to find out how he contrived to get rid of the Lieutenant! At all events, however, it was not the Count who was put upon a false scent. So like servants! they never know anything correctly."

Meanwhile Blenda had fallen asleep in a corner of the sofa; and the sanguine mother soon followed her example, and dreamed of all her castles in the air.

* * * * *

Towards three o'clock in the morning, the whole house was astir.

The Deputy made his appearance, and announced the arrival of the steamer, which would start again in an hour; and weary and depressed the ladies came forth from their room.

There was a sound of hurrying to and fro, and banging of doors, but in the Count's apartment all was still.

As Blenda crossed the hall, and turned a last look towards the chamber occupied by their neighbour, she could not divest herself of a feeling of disappointment, and of some little annoyance, for which she was at a loss to account.

When, however, she got into the open air, and beheld the beauty and stillness of the morning, and the wonderful steamer, on board of which she was to undertake so long a journey, her thoughts took a different direction; and their character was yet further changed, when, in taking leave of the Deputy, she felt as though she was bidding farewell once more to her dear old home. It was like parting over again with her father's grave; her flower-beds, her doves, old lame Britta, and the harpsichord—the cherished harpsichord—oh, could she ever hope to sing her song of Sir Egbert again!

When the machinery was at length in motion and the steamer put off from the land, Blenda found it impossible to restrain her tears. Standing beside her mother, whose sleepy yet eager gaze sought to embrace every surrounding object, she looked back to the shore which they were leaving, and then suddenly perceived an object which brought the crimson to her cheeks, and a bright smile to display the beauty of her chiselled lips.

It was the stranger who had accosted her the day before.

He stood somewhat aloof from the crowd, and perceiving that he had attracted her attention, he took off his hat and bowed, in a manner indicating a certain degree of friendly acquaintance mingled with respect.

It was about an hour after this that the ladies went down to their cabin; and although they read upon the door the number which had been engaged for them, they fancied they must have been mistaken, when they saw upon the table a large and beautiful bouquet of fresh flowers, with a parcel of books beside it. On drawing near to the table, however, they perceived that there could be no mistake, for the parcel was directed to "Mademoiselle Blenda von Kühlen."

The stewardess, on being summoned, ex-

plained that the flowers and parcel had been brought, before the ladies came on board, by a young man with dark hair, with whose name, however, she was unacquainted."

CHAPTER VI.

CONQUESTS.

BLENDA's delight on finding herself possessed of a *whole library*—for she could not bring herself to consider six different works as anything less—was by no means diminished by the mysterious and delicate manner in which it had been presented to her. And the fresh and beautiful flowers not only gratified her senses by their perfume, but her feelings, by the recollection they conveyed of the brief, but deeply interesting interview of the previous day.

This interview afforded an inexhaustible feast to the imagination of our romantic little heroine, and she was even content that it should not have been prolonged in reality, since she was thereby enabled to tack on to it as many various continuations and terminations as her fancy pleased.

We need say nothing of the exultation of Madame von Kühlen,—had she not prophesied that adventures would throng upon them as thick as snow-flakes? But her face lengthened considerably as she began to examine the titles of the books.

"'Kenilworth'—my goodness! that is the very book by that tiresome Walter Scott, that I once sent back to the circulating library!"

"But I know nothing about that, dear Mamma!"

"Oh, no! you know nothing about it . . . that was five . . . or six years ago . . . 'Ivanhoe' . . . hem! . . . if people do make a present of books I think they might . . ."

"Oh dear, Mamma, do not let us be ungrateful! These works will open quite a new world before me; and as the Count has had the kindness to choose them himself . . ."

"I have nothing to say against your defence of your Count. But, now look yourself, and tell me what are the names of the others."

Slowly, in order to prolong her enjoyment as much as possible, Blenda proceeded to make herself acquainted with Cooper's "Last of the Mohicans," and "Pirate," and with Bulwer's "Pelham" and the "Disowned," as well as with two smaller works, which had been inserted amongst the rest, and at this particular moment were not the least welcome of the collection—namely, a "Guide Book of Stockholm," and another of their route along the Ship Canal, together with a map.

"What kindness—what true friendship—what eagerness not only to give us pleasure,

but also to be of use to us?" said Blenda to herself; "I am sure this stranger must mean very kindly towards me. . . . I will not forget his advice, if by any chance I should attract attention."

During the passage across Lake Wener, which proved disagreeable enough, owing to the swell caused by the gale of the preceding day, our passengers found themselves obliged to remain in their cabin, and the loquacity as well as the imagination of the elder lady were in some degree restrained by sea-sickness.

The thing upon which she now principally dwelt was the vexatious circumstance of having to pay for a breakfast and dinner which she was unable to eat,—she considered it a sin and a shame, and her only consolation was in the reflection, that the next day she would do her utmost to eat enough for two.

Blenda was a little uncomfortable also, not so much so, however, but that she was able both to eat and to read, and thus to make herself in some degree acquainted beforehand with all the wonders and beauties which she was about to behold. She was, perhaps, in her heart a little glad that she need not appear too ignorant, and would be able to repress the exclamations of amazement and delight which would doubtless have escaped her had it not been for the forethought of the "Knight of the closed Vizor," or "Knight of the Black Riband," as she likewise found pleasure in designating her hero.

In the afternoon she was seized with a desire to look out upon the agitated waters; and as she now felt able to keep her footing, she made an excursion on deck on her own account, while her mother was asleep.

She felt a little embarrassed and uncomfortable on finding herself the only woman amongst about half-a-dozen gentlemen; but as she thought it would look foolish if she ran down again directly, she seated herself on one of the green benches, and after gazing long, and with intense interest, on the boiling surface of Lake Wener, she ventured to cast a glance at her fellow-passengers.

The result was satisfactory, for all the six had that aspect of wooden propriety which proves far better than words could do, that there is no danger to be apprehended in their society. Two of them were snoring in concert. Two others—long, brown, thin, dry-looking individuals, enveloped in dark great-coats, sat motionless as statues, smoking their cigars. Blenda afterwards learnt from the kind old Captain, whose acquaintance she had already made, that these two gentlemen were English—the same who had been in their hotel, and whom her mother had set down as lords—and that the one was an engineer, and the other the foreman of a brewery on their road to the places where their services were required.

The remaining two were respectable citizens, long past the age of ogling a pretty girl, who continued to pace the quarter-

deck without paying the least attention to Blenda.

"I can sit here as safely as in our own cabin," thought Blenda, and thereupon opened her guide-book, in which she soon became absorbed; she longed to behold all the beauties it described, and which reminded her of a fairy tale.

"Do you not find it a little cold here, Mademoiselle?" said a voice beside her, in a tone of marked courtesy.

Blenda looked up in surprise, and beheld the Lieutenant whom she had met the evening before on the stairs.

Blenda always blushed readily, and if her whole face was now suffused with crimson, the reason was that the Lieutenant was acquainted with the Count, and might possibly make some incidental mention of him.

The young officer, who knew that his own good looks were quite sufficient to produce an agreeable impression, did not hesitate a moment to account for Blenda's blush and her embarrassed silence, by assuming it as a fact that the little country beauty had fallen desperately in love with him. And in order to show himself thankful for a preference which, besides offering itself so readily, was an inestimable advantage at that moment, owing to the amusement it would afford him on the journey, he immediately assumed a tone in which a sort of presuming familiarity was blended with the most insinuating courtesy.

"I believe, Mademoiselle von Kühlen, that on a journey it is not only allowable, but customary, to lay aside the ordinary rules of etiquette. Permit me, therefore, in the first place, to introduce myself as Lieutenant S—, very much at your service; and in the next, to inform you that, so early as yesterday, I obtained the agreeable certainty that I should have the privilege of making my journey in the company of one so beautiful."

Our heroine did not doubt that the free and easy tone adopted by her new acquaintance was a characteristic of good society, and moreover, found it very pleasant, although it failed to confer the same charm upon him which she had discovered in her mysterious knight of the preceding day; and without ever dreaming that she was now on the brink of one of the very dangers of which she had been forewarned by him, she replied with all the frankness befitting, in her opinion, a girl who would only make herself ridiculous by a display of rustic timidity.—

"If it is one of the privileges of travellers to dispense with etiquette—to that I can have no objection; so by all means let us begin at once."

The Lieutenant looked with some surprise at his new conquest. "Really," thought he to himself, "this is what one may call a piece of luck. . . . Where *can* this little innocent coquette have come from?" but aloud he said, "Nothing in the world could be more agreeable to me than such a proposition, and the first advantage that I shall take of our

agreement, is to install myself your *cicerone* and *cavalier* in ordinary for the journey. Will you consent to this?"

"With great pleasure!" replied Blenda, laughing.

At that moment, however, a firm heavy tread was heard upon the stairs, and a voice in which Blenda instantly recognized that of the friendly Captain, said, "Such a *cavalier* will never do! The little lady shall have one in me, instead. Young ladies must not choose their squires so young!"

And with these words the old Captain quietly ensconced himself in the seat beside Blenda, which the Lieutenant was about to take.

"That," said the latter, concealing his vexation under the mask of a somewhat equivocal smile, "is a degree of attention which I do not suppose all captains consider it a part of their duty to display."

"So much the worse," replied the skipper, coolly.

"The worse!—and why so?"

"Because every captain ought to be the person to keep order on board his own vessel; and above all, to be the guardian of every unprotected female who travels under his escort."

"What say you, Mademoiselle, to the philanthropic sentiments of our Captain?" asked the Lieutenant.

"I say that they seem to me to resemble those of a good father," replied Blenda, glancing kindly at the old man; "and that I am quite ready to show myself an obedient daughter."

"Well, that is a reply which does honor to a young lady, and for my part, I promise that my protection shall be effectual."

Some other passengers now claimed the Captain's attention, and despite all the efforts of the Lieutenant to detain her, Blenda went down stairs to see whether her mother were awake.

* * * * *

When the voyage across the lake was over, Madame von Kühlen became once more her usual self; and, after minutely examining the arrangements of the steamer, she began, with no small address, to make herself acquainted with her fellow-passengers. She was especially bent upon seeing the Russian prince and the English lords; but no one was aware of the presence of such exalted personages on board. Madame von Kühlen, however, believed this to be merely well-feigned ignorance, for the furtherance of some secret motive: and in the evening she said to her daughter,

"I would wager Black Rose herself—if I still had her, that is—that his Highness is on board. Of that I am firmly convinced; and as for the English lords, I have not only seen, but heard them the whole afternoon. Indeed, to tell you the truth, Blenda, I have already seen the Prince myself."

"Have you, indeed?"

"Yes, this afternoon, just after you were gone on deck, I was awoken by some one open-

ing the door; and a man with a clear olive complexion, and a rather gloomy, but nevertheless agreeable countenance, said to me: 'I beg pardon: I see I am mistaken.' I understood him perfectly, although he spoke with a strong Russian accent."

"Well," said Blenda, "whether he be a Russian prince or no, that does not signify to us!"

"Not signify to us? You never can understand anything. However, we will wait till to-morrow!"

But, alas! the next day all these clouds of mystery were dispelled.

As soon as the Captain had succeeded in understanding who were the persons in question, he gave the desired explanation. What the haughty English nobles proved to be, we already know; and the Russian prince was transformed into an old officer from Finland, returning from the baths of Gustavsberg. This was a dagger to the heart of the romantic mother: thus *four* almost *certain* resources were cut off at once; for had the Count remained any longer in Blenda's society, or had the others really been what they were supposed to be, there could be no doubt that something would have come of it. The sensation produced by Blenda was unmistakable, as was plainly proved by the attentions of the young men who were on board.

This was a fact. There were amongst the passengers four young *elegants*. The first was the Lieutenant, who had already put himself on the footing of an old acquaintance. Next to him came a young Baron, who professed to be acquainted with such an endless list of families in the capital, that if Madame von Kühlen and her daughter would trust to him, he would be able to give them recommendations to his lady friends, which would be of great use to them, in the matter of embroideries, and so forth. Thirdly, there was a royal Secretary,* who was a great admirer of the newly introduced *haute école* of horsemanship, and asked leave to present tickets to the young lady and her mother for the first performance that should take place after the arrival of the party in Stockholm. Lastly, there was a very fashionable young commercial traveller, who seemed to be more deeply smitten than all the rest, and who requested permission to drive the ladies to see the various royal palaces and villas.

Madame von Kühlen was in a state of enchantment at all these proffered civilities. The only difficulty was to know which of the four *cavaliers* to prefer; and had it been the Baron who had made the offer of the carriage, she would most probably have decided in his favour. As it was, however, she resolved to come to no decision at all, and not to give the slightest encouragement to any one of them; for if already Blenda had made four conquests, what might they not expect when once she reached the capital?

"No," said she to herself, "we must be

free to accept whatever fortune may have in store for us."

Meanwhile the worthy Captain found that he had undertaken a Herculean labour in looking after his pretty *protégée*. For notwithstanding her declared determination to prove an obedient daughter, she was only too well inclined to give ear to the eloquence of her young admirers. She had not the slightest idea that there could be anything objectionable in so doing, and would doubtless in her simplicity have drawn down upon herself the severest animadversions of the other ladies on board, concerning the freedom of her manners, if the Captain, who had a real kindness for her, and thought her very insufficiently guarded by "that old goose," her mother, had not at length betrayed to her a certain little secret which he had promised to keep.

This occurred one evening at Berg,* when Blenda, surrounded by all her cavaliers, who were anxious to take her on shore, for the first time exhibited a little impatience of the Captain's guardianship, when he advised her to wait for the escort of an old gentleman whom he had appointed her attendant in ordinary, and who, he assured her, would have finished his game of cards in a few minutes.

Madame von Kühlen had resolved to remain on board; and when the rest of the party landed, Blenda had to wait until the game was over before she could follow. As she watched them her countenance bore an expression of unusual annoyance; but she had at any rate the satisfaction of perceiving that *her* gentlemen lingered behind, suffering all the others to pass them.

Presently the Captain approached, but was not welcomed with her usual good-humoured smile.

"I see, my little lady," said he, "that you think me quite a tyrant; but I assure you that I wish only for your good. It is not at all desirable that you should have these young Jackanapeses always dangling after you."

"But what harm do they do?" asked Blenda, a tear of vexation glistening in her eye.

"That it would take too long to explain just now. Suffice it to say that you have a friend who has specially commended you to my care; and that, even at the risk of appearing disagreeably officious, I am determined to fulfil the promise which I made to this individual, with whom I am not even acquainted, but who is, I am certain, an estimable man."

"A friend of mine?" cried Blenda, and the altered expression that beamed in her

* The lowest rank of court officials in Sweden.

* At Berg there are fifteen locks within the space of a quarter of a mile Swedish, seven of which are close to one another, and to the lake. The fall is of about 136 feet. And as the estate of Brumby, and the abbey church of Wreta, containing the tombs of several kings of Sweden and other eminent personages, are in the immediate neighbourhood, it is usual for the passengers to visit these places, while the vessel works its way through the locks.

eyes, while her cheeks assumed the soft, downy crimson of a ripe peach, was a sight worth seeing.

"I think I understood him to say that he was in some way connected with you. Be that as it may, however, I promised not to mention him—and this promise I have now broken, partly in order to explain my own conduct, and partly to give you pleasure, and make it appear less annoying to you."

"Was that by any chance the same person, who,—who,—"

"—brought the parcel and the flowers—yes, that was the very man. But look, here comes Mr. Ramsby—so now make haste and go on shore."

From that moment Blenda's manners afforded no food for criticism. She no longer showed the same eager interest that she had formerly done when surrounded by her young admirers, and even sometimes appeared to shrink from their too marked attentions.

But she dwelt with bashful delight upon the recollection of her Knight of the Black Riband. Even from a distance then he watched over her; and his gentle warning resumed its influence—an influence all the more powerful that it was now aided by the reflection, "Why should he guard me thus if he had no anticipation of seeing me again?"

CHAPTER VII.

BEHIND THE SCENES.

"HERE I am. I hope there is no danger. Of course you sent for the doctor immediately?"

Such were the words uttered by a young lady of about twenty, as she hurriedly traversed the small ante-chamber, stopping before the glass, notwithstanding her haste, to take off her bonnet and arrange her hair.

The person addressed only put her finger to her lips, and nodded her head. Her appearance evidently denoted one of those respectable individuals, who, under the name of house-keepers, are very apt to be in fact the main-spring of the household machine.

"Well, my good Deborah, what did he say?" resumed the lady in a tone of mingled anxiety and curiosity.

"He said it was a very serious attack, and that the old lady would be obliged to be extremely careful after it. But is not Mr. Patrick coming?"

"He will follow me directly—there were some people with him on business. This is a very sad business, Deborah. I am exceedingly fond of my mother-in-law, but I almost think it a bad thing to recall painful recollection."

The corner of Deborah's apron was instantly applied to her eyes. "Very true, and I who lived twenty years in your parents' house have better cause than any one to grieve for my good mistress. If she had not followed her husband so quickly, I should assuredly not be where I

am. Not that I would make any complaint. The old lady is something stiff to deal with; but she is upright and kind for all that; but will not you go in now, Ma'am?"

"Yes,—but by-the-bye, is it not to-day that those country cousins are to arrive? I own I should not feel much gratified by being sent to meet them."

"Oh, Ma'am, whatever you do, pray do not refuse if there should be any question of it,—Mr. Patrick would, I am sure, be so kind—"

"Ay, but Patrick's blessed kindness might very likely lead to something which it would be best to prevent. Everybody knows that poor relations think they have a right to tack themselves on to the rich like so many creeping plants. A pleasant prospect, indeed,—and I have already more tiresome acquaintance than I have any occasion for;—but now let us go in."

The young wife passed through a small and simply furnished, but very neat parlour, and entered her mother-in-law's bedroom, of which the door, which had been standing ajar, was closed by Deborah, who entered after her.

"Do you want to stifle me, that you must needs shut the door!" exclaimed a displeased voice from the huge curtained bed, which presently afterwards resumed, in a milder tone,—
"Oh, so there you are, my dear Henrietta!—Where is Patrick?"

"He will be here directly; but, dear Mama, I was so frightened when I heard of those terrible spasms that I would not wait for him."

"Oh, you need not imagine the matter to be so serious as that. There is no occasion for you to put on a funereal face before the time, my dear."

"How can you talk so, dear mother!"

"Well, then, look like your usual self—Is not everybody subject to some slight ailment now and then? This is not at all a worse attack than I have often had before, only it comes at an unlucky moment, as I am expecting my sister and my little niece this very day."

"Then may I not stay with you, dear mother, while Deborah goes to the Biddarholm* to meet them? The vessel will be sure not to come in till the afternoon."

"Many thanks, my little fine lady; but if you think it beneath your dignity to go yourself to fetch your mother-in-law's sister and niece, I shall be at no loss to find some one who will show them their way hither."

Henrietta was silent, and cast a glance at Deborah, who, under shelter of the curtain, entertained her by signs to keep the peace.

Opposite the foot of the bed hung a picture of the old lady's eldest son, painted when he was a child, and upon this her eyes now rested. "My poor John!" said she with a sigh, "it would have been hard for me to bear, and for him too, if I had been called away while he is beyond the sea; and it is but little more than a month yet since he went away. It will be long before the half-year is over."

"But," said Henrietta, glad that her mother-

* One of the islands on which Stockholm is built. It has a harbour for steamers plying between Stockholm and the west or south by the Södertilge canal.

in-law had not reverted to the former subject of conversation, "can it require so much time to negotiate a fresh supply of ornaments and knick-knacks?"

"Of course it requires time to do it well, so that the investment may prove a profitable one; besides, it is sometimes necessary to wait for a good opportunity. At any rate he has often contemplated this journey to Paris when he has been in Hamburg before You see my John is not very fond of staying quietly at home, but next month he will be eight-and-twenty, and no doubt wisdom will come with years."

"Well, I should like to know who is wise if John is not. I do not think it is merely the three years that he is older than Patrick which makes the difference."

"Hush, daughter! A wife never supposes that *any one* is wiser than her husband, especially"—continued she in a low whisper which brought the blood in torrents to Henrietta's cheeks—"especially when people, who know no better, say that she would rather have married some one else than the husband whom God has given her."

"It is time for you to take your medicine, Ma'am," interposed Deborah; and with these words she made her way between the two ladies, and with well-meant haste snatched a paper from the table.

"I think you are mistaken, my good Deborah! It is true I cannot see the clock, but still I know better than that; and thank God I have always been accustomed to punctuality."

"Yes, very true, it wants ten minutes of the time—but there is the bell—that must be Mr. Patrick."

Accordingly the party in the bed-chamber was almost immediately reinforced by the addition of a young man of five-and-twenty, who approached the bed with the tranquil cordiality of a person of calm character, and kissed his mother's hand, a token of affection which he never omitted when he came or went away, or after dinner; yet it was evident that this was nothing more than the observance of a custom enforced in the days of his boyhood.

"Thank God, dear mother, that you are in no danger; I can see that at a glance!"

"Yes, much you know about how much danger I am in!" replied the irritable old woman, who now appeared to be as ill-pleased with her son's attempts at consolation, as she had before been with her daughter-in-law's expressions of sympathy. "I suppose you think I shall live on to all eternity; but you never can see an inch before your nose."

"There now, I have caught it! but, dear mother, why should you object to my wishing that you might live to all eternity, or at least as long as you can and like to do so? And why should you not live on for a long time, since you are not yet sixty years old?"

"My dear Patrick, if you are not better informed as to your mother's age, it would be quite as well that you should not talk about it. I was two-and-sixty last spring Deborah, the powder! . . . she is always for-

getting. . . . I feel such an oppression at my chest!"

"You drove off without me," whispered Patrick to his wife, "I meant to have come with you."

"Fugh! what horrid bitter stuff that is! Oh! so she drove off without you? was she in such a desperate hurry? That was probably the fault of the new droschky which she was eager to try."

"I wished to come here as quickly as I could, dear mother."

"But I should have been better pleased, dear daughter, if you had waited for your husband; for if people must live in such grand style as to keep their horse and carriage, it would not be amiss that husband and wife should enjoy their luxuries together."

"Well, dear mother," interposed Patrick, "there is no reason for grudging oneself an indulgence, provided one does not pay for it with other people's money. And I dare say I shall take a drive by myself in the droschky some of these days—so then we shall be quits."

"Yes—it is not difficult to be quits with you, my good Patrick."

"I hope it is not such a very hard matter with me either," said Henrietta, in an insinuating tone.

Mistress Regina Sophia appeared not to hear, or possibly she was compelled to silence by the pain she suffered, which was in fact severer than she chose to allow; for she had determined to battle with death, so to speak, until the joy of her heart, her favourite son John, should return home.

It would be a mistake, however, to suppose, that this favourite was exempted from her maternal criticisms. He was, on the contrary, more exposed than any one else to the tyranny which mingled with her affection.

One feature of the character of this in the main kind-hearted and estimable woman, was an innate propensity to carp and find fault, which reached its highest point whenever she had an attack of spasms. But what was still more remarkable was, that she could break off and change sides in the very midst of her censures, the moment she thought that the object of her animadversions was exposed to attack from another quarter.

Her affections were centred upon three principal objects. She idolized her eldest son—was sincerely attached to her second—and stood rather on the defensive with respect to her daughter-in-law, although she had herself selected her to be the bride of one of her sons; it was John's own fault that Patrick had been able to add the pretty Henrietta's fifty thousand dollars banco to his capital in trade.

Patrick at length ventured to break silence; "Dear mother," said he, "do you not think you could sleep a little? it would perhaps do you good."

"My dear, I shall sleep when I am sleepy; I had plenty of rest last night, for this attack did not come on till the morning . . . But I am thinking of my sister. I fear you will have to

go and wait for her, my good Patrick, for, poor thing, I should be sorry that she should have no one to show her the way, after I have myself advised her to come hither."

"And I will be sure not to neglect my errand, that you may depend upon! It would be very hard upon those two poor women, of whom, probably, nobody has taken any notice on board the steamer, if they had not even a friendly face to welcome them on their arrival. But, at all events, I will give them the comfortable assurance that they will find affectionate cousins here."

"But perhaps it is not so easy for you to leave your business," interposed Henrietta. "In that case I would..."

"Oh, no, daughter-in-law, do not think of giving yourself so much trouble. It will be better that you should remain with me, as you offered to do, until Patrick's return."

"As you please, dear mother."

When the husband went out, however, the wife accompanied him into the hall, and then ensued the following dialogue:—

"You will of course remember, Patrick, that I do not expect any cousins."

"What do you mean?"

"That we have more than enough hangers-on already—and that it is quite sufficient that the greater part of the plain-work of our establishment is to be taken from Miss Peterson—to whom I had intended to give the whole—in order to bestow it upon people one knows nothing about..."

"Well, well, my dear, but I cannot refuse to acknowledge the relationship. You must not be proud, my little Henrietta."

The young wife shrugged her shoulders with a look of impatience. "How could I expect that you should feel as I do!"

"But of course I do—I cannot do otherwise, when you are so sensible, and feel so sensibly—but you see how the matter stands..."

"Good-bye, my dear; I have no wish to interfere with you and your conduct: you are the master of your own actions and of your own shop, but I am mistress of my house—and into it no one shall come—do you understand?—but those I wish to see!"

And with a mocking shake of the head, the lady vanished.

Her husband stood looking after her for a few moments, with a very long face, and then said philosophically to himself:

"She will come to terms, however!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE WELCOME.

MISTRESS REGINA SOPHIA was so much better in the afternoon that she was able to sit up in bed, but when tea was ready, and the travellers had not yet made their appearance, she grew impatient.

At length the bell was heard in the ante-chamber.

"Quick, Deborah—quick, quick! My goodness! it is nearly thirty years since Emerentia and I have met—well, well, I know her voice again, nevertheless—yes, that is she."

And Madame von Kühlen, followed by Blenda, came tripping into the room.

Now nothing in the world could be more natural than that the romantic sister should throw herself with a burst of tears into the arms of the prosaic one; but neither could anything be more natural than that the latter should, with her usual abruptness, put an end to all romance.

"Gently, gently—ah, I see you are just the same as ever. What, do you think it a calamity to see me again, that you cannot keep from crying?"

"I feel so delighted, and at the same time so sad," sobbed Emerentia. "It seems so unfortunate that you should be ill this day of all others, just as if I brought misfortune into the house."

"Why, you are just as foolish as you used to be, poor thing! But, dear me! how thin and shrivelled you have grown! you were very different when we two parted at Göteborg."

"Ah! you may well say that! That was a merry time when Aunt Tena had celebrated your wedding with Captain Blücher. And then you went with your husband on board his ship to Stockholm... and—"

"Hush! hush! that all passed away like a dream—my poor Blücher! Before the year was out, fortune had changed, and he was lost with his ship, and all hands. God help me! those were sorrowful days."

The eyes of the strong woman filled with tears at the remembrance of the one brief dream of her youth. But she soon recovered herself, and with her usual masculine abruptness thrust her sister aside, saying she wished to look at her niece.

Blenda had meanwhile been surveyed from head to foot by Henrietta, who sat at the window in all her pride and grandeur, looking at her poor relation, as if she expected her to sink into the earth beneath her gaze.

"So—that is the little girl, is it!—come here, my dear—don't be shy—I am not going to eat you!"

But Blenda, for the first time in her life, could not help feeling really shy. The short sharp tone of the old lady, and her peculiar manner of expressing her feelings on seeing again a sister from whom she had been separated for thirty years, astonished her to such a degree, that she was quite unable to do more than curtsy modestly to her strange aunt, whose hand she touched at the same time with her quivering lips.

"What a little goose!" said Aunt Regina Sophia in a tone that was meant to be very kind. "... Well, I really believe *she* is going to indulge me with a shower-bath... My dears, do you do nothing but cry in West Gothland? That is a very bad habit!"

"Do not be so sheepish and childish, my

love," whispered Madame von Kühlen to her daughter; "your aunt likes people to show a good heart; you were not so timid on the journey."

"I beg a thousand pardons!" stammered Blenda, as making an effort, she raised her soft eyes to the open though sharp-featured countenance of her aunt.

"So trifling a fault is easily forgiven; but there must be little crying if you wish to find favour with me. Come, it is all right now!" And the old lady was pleased to wipe the tears from Blenda's cheeks with her own handkerchief, and then to contemplate with no small satisfaction the lovely face of her niece.

Madame von Kühlen kept her eyes steadfastly fixed on her sister's countenance during this inspection. She trembled lest she, upon whom their fate mainly depended, should not be pleased; but her mind was presently set at rest by the following words:—

"Well, well, Nature has been no step-mother in this case: healthy, well-made, and fresh and pretty as an opening flower. And now turn round, and I will show you your cousin Henrietta, my daughter-in-law."

At these words the linedraper's elegant wife slowly rose from her seat at the window, and with an air of condescension approached first Madame von Kühlen, and then Blenda, to whom she extended the tips of her fingers, saying with a smile—

"Welcome to Stockholm, my little girl. I will lose no time in recommending myself as a customer to so skilful a seamstress as I know you to be; for I have a great deal of work I wish to have done."

The look which the mother-in-law turned upon the dignified daughter-in-law was a sight to see.

"Recommend yourself in the first place as a relation, which would be far more to the purpose, in my opinion. As to customers, those I can provide. . . . Now, my dear Emerentia, will you not do your nephew's wife the honour of embracing her? There—that is as it ought to be. Now comes my little Blenda's turn: you ought to kiss each other as a matter of course, like sisters."

Blenda raised an affectionate, imploring glance to the face of her unknown relation; but if Henrietta did not venture to disobey the commands of her despotic mother-in-law, she at any rate could not be prevented from returning with marked coldness and indifference the timid salute of the cousin thus forced upon her.

"Very good," muttered Regina Sophia, with an expressive glance at her daughter-in-law; "but now sit down, my dears, and make yourselves at home. I cannot bear to see people look as if they did not know whether they ought to go or stay. And now, Deborah, let us have tea immediately, that Mrs. Patrick may be able to drive home. . . . But by-the-by, where is my son? did he not come here with you?"

"Here I am, mother: I only went to dismiss the hackney-coachman."

"So you took a carriage to come here? well,

that was quite right this time. . . . Had you to wait for Patrick, or was he there when you arrived?"

"No, indeed," declared Madame von Kühlen, "we had not a minute to wait."

"And even if my aunt had been obliged to wait a little while," added Patrick, laughing, "I scarcely think she would have perceived it; for you must know, dear mother, that I could scarcely make my way to the ladies, so surrounded were they with gentlemen, all vying with each other in offering all sorts of civilities. I really believe they would have liked to drag my little cousin Blenda's carriage themselves."

The effect of this speech upon the countenances of the hearers was very various. That of Madame von Kühlen beamed with triumphant maternal pride; in that of Henrietta might be read envy mingled with excessive astonishment; and in that of Regina Sophia a degree of displeasure which she made no attempt to conceal.

"What does this mean?" asked she, in a tone resembling the muttering of a distant storm. "Is it of such stuff that you are made, girl? is that your taste?"

"Dear Regina Sophia, do not let your suspicions rest upon the child," interposed Madame von Kühlen, throwing herself heroically into the breach in defence of her darling.

"Be quiet, sister, and let her answer for herself: she is old enough to have the use of her tongue. Now look me in the face, you little minx, and give me a straightforward answer—do you hear? Does the society of young gentlemen give you great pleasure?"

"Yes, dear aunt, it certainly does."

At this frank answer Henrietta burst into as loud a fit of laughter that her mother-in-law inquired sharply whether she were going into convulsions; after which, the rigid matron, who herself required a little time to recover from its effects, said:—"At any rate, no one can accuse you of insincerity, and that is a very good thing, so far; but if you wish to remain under my protection, you must dispense with similar pleasures. . . . Your polite gentlemen have no doubt asked permission to come hither, and see how you get on in your new home?"

Blenda's blushing cheeks gave the answer which she did not venture to utter in words.

"Yes, I see how the land lies—very much obliged indeed. And you, Emerentia, could you really consent to this?"

"Why, upon my word, I said neither yes nor no for that matter. But you see there was a talk of taking us to see the royal palaces; and Baron T—sward was so very obliging as to promise to recommend Blenda to several ladies of quality whom he knew, and who wanted embroidery done."

"Heaven help us! what a simpleton you are to allow the girl to accept such offers! She shall do plain-work for Patrick's ware-house; and as for the royal palaces, she will be able to see them all in good time, without troubling any such sparks to escort her."

"But I do assure you, dearest Regina So-

phia, that these young men were one and all perfectly well-conducted and honourable in their intentions. I am not myself altogether so foolish or so inexperienced as not to know what is proper and what is not."

It was evident from the tone of Madame von Kühlen's defence that she was both a little provoked and a little hurt; but her sister, far from paying any attention to this, merely turned to Deborah, who now appeared with the tea, and said:—

"Listen, Deborah, once for all; if any young gentlemen come here and ask for Madame von Kühlen and this young lady, they are to be dismissed with the information that the ladies do not admit visitors. And now not another word upon the subject. Pour out the tea."

After these orders had been issued by the old lady, whose rule over her whole family was so arbitrary, a submissive silence ensued, which lasted as long as the teacups continued to rattle; but as soon as they had been set down again upon the tray, Henrietta began to draw her shawl around her, and Patrick to suppose that his mother would like to be alone with her newly arrived guests.

"What I wish now is to be *quite alone*," replied Mistress Regina Sophia. "Deborah shall take my sister and the child to their room, that they may put their things in order. To-morrow they will rest, and after to-morrow, Patrick, you can send the shirting."

All now took their leave. As Henrietta did so, she expressed a hope that she should find her mother-in-law quite recovered the next day; to which the latter replied, rather tartly,—

"You may send to enquire. I will not detain you longer away from your villa. . . . Now good-bye. . . . If I am well on Sunday, you can come and dine with me."

* * * * *

When, after Deborah's departure, Madame von Kühlen found herself alone with her daughter in the large, airy, and very neat room assigned to them, the first impulse of both was to throw themselves into each other's arms.

"Do not form your judgment at first sight, my child," were the first words of the mother, whose own habitually cheerful heart itself felt rather in need of comfort.

"Oh!" whispered Blenda, "how foolish we were with our castles in the air! Now here we are shut up like prisoners."

"Oh, no, my child, you must not think so: things will not turn out so bad as all that."

"But only look at the window—that great dingy wall blocks out all the view. We do not even see a strip of blue sky."

"Dear child, we know the look of it well; and at any rate we shall have it in our hearts, if we do not lose hope and courage."

"How can we help it, dear mother? Now tell me really and truly whether you feel courage or hope at this moment."

"Yes, to be sure I do! My poor sister is unwell, and besides, her disposition was always rather imperious. Meanwhile, I solemnly assure you that she means kindly by us.

And Patrick—but you saw yourself how cordial and friendly he was, as he proved by coming to fetch us in *such* a carriage."

"Cousin Patrick is very kind, and I have no fault to find with him; for though his appearance is not striking, nor his manners very good, at any rate he has a heart, and a warm one. But his wife—I do not know why she looked at me and behaved to me so strangely, as if—in short, I cannot explain how it was, but it annoyed me very much."

"Oh, that will all be better in time, my child. If she is a little proud, perhaps that may be the way of Stockholm ladies. And besides, Regina Sophia gave her a good set down."

"Yes, that was the worst of it. Think how disagreeable life must be in a house where the mother-in-law is constantly finding fault with the daughter-in-law. To be sure, she seems to do so to everybody; and, I am sure, if wishing could do any good, I should wish with all my heart that we could wake in our old home to-morrow."

"And so give up the recollection of the journey, which has afforded you so much pleasure; and of the afternoon at Wenersborg, which I should think was worth something too."

"Oh, yes, to be sure!" and Blenda's eyes began to brighten a little. "That afternoon was the best of all; for he it is that I have to thank for the only pleasure that I shall be able to enjoy here"—and she pointed to the packet of books.

"And, for my part, I am convinced," continued Madame von Kühlen, who was very anxious to chase the cloud from her daughter's brow, "that the Count will come to Stockholm one of these days; and they will never venture to shut the door upon *him*, with his distinguished and gentleman-like appearance; for any one must be blind indeed, to imagine that his intentions were not of an honourable kind, as my sister may, perhaps, suspect of the four others,—and, between ourselves, possibly not quite without reason."

"Neither do I care much about them," replied Blenda, whose thoughts had wandered from the books to their kind donor, and to the counsel which he had given her at parting, and which evinced so much real interest in her welfare: "Do not too frankly accept the courtesies and offers of service which you will doubtless meet with. One who is young, especially if she be beautiful, and have no male protector, must use a little caution."

Her mother smiled. "I am quite content with things as they are," said she. "Now, you are just like the captive princess in the tower; and my sister is the dragon, ready to do battle with all the champions who are desirous of beholding the imprisoned beauty."

"Well, then, I must be content, I suppose," said Blenda, whose naturally buoyant and joyous disposition readily threw off, under the influence of these arguments, the gloomy impressions which she had at first conceived. "Nevertheless," continued she, smiling, "I feel convinced that no one will ever conquer the

dragon, and that I shall have to remain in the tower until death—or, perhaps, my knight—sets me free.”

“So be it! And now let us look about us in a cheerful spirit, and we shall find that things are not so much amiss. Oh, my child, what a handsome sofa, covered with real moreen! and a polished mahogany chest of drawers, with a looking-glass upon it—only think of that! and a work-table! All this is really very kind of Regina Sophia; and everything is so dear, too, at Stockholm!”

“You must allow, though, that it is very dark and gloomy here. And those great masses of houses—those interminable streets—to me it looks very depressing!”

“And yet you were almost wild with delight when you first caught sight of the city.”

“Yes, but then I was on board the steamer; and, besides, it looks so beautiful from thence that I could almost go wild again if I were to see it now. But when one is actually in the town, it is very different; the noise in the streets alone is enough to deafen one.”

“You will get to like it all, my love, when you once get used to it, or, as my worthy grandmother used to say, when you have had time to get warm in your clothes. . . And now let us begin to unpack our things, so that when the good housekeeper comes back, she may not suspect us of being dissatisfied, but may find us looking grateful and contented; for my sister will ask her how she found us—you may depend upon it.”

CHAPTER IX.

THE BEGINNING OF A NEW LIFE.

It might almost be considered fortunate, under the circumstances, that the rigid mistress of the house was so exhausted by talking, and by the exertions she had made, as to be reduced the next day to a state of debility, which rendered it physically impossible for her to tyrannize much either over herself or over others.

This change produced an immediate effect upon Blenda's compassionate heart; she began to tend her sick aunt, carefully but quietly; and receiving in return an occasional glance which might almost be called affectionate, she was quite won over. And when, moreover, she learnt from Deborah how kind her aunt was, notwithstanding the rugged abruptness of her manner and character, and how much good she did in secret, although no one ever ventured to thank her, Blenda resolved to submit patiently to the guidance of her protectress, feeling convinced that she should not fail, by dint of obedience, cheerfulness, and industry, to obtain her good will.

She was not mistaken; for the first fortnight, Blenda was desired to sit down stairs, under pretext of keeping her aunt company, but in reality because Mistress Regina Sophia wished to have the opportunity of ascertaining

two things for herself; first, how quick, and above all how persevering, Blenda could be at her sewing; and, secondly, how patient and submissive her character might be, which it was not difficult to ascertain, for, during the whole of this period of probation, she never went further than her aunt's garden, which was close to the house, and whither not even her mother accompanied her—“for,” thought her aunt, “I cannot depend upon that goose,”—but in her stead Mrs. Deborah, who had received explicit orders to have her eyes about her, so that there should be no contraband dealings in “crocodile glances” through the railings.

Blenda, who was not the least aware of the fiery ordeal through which she was passing, and still less so that three notes to herself and her mother had been intercepted and confiscated, after several visits had already been declined, wondered a little in her heart that nothing had been heard of her four courteous fellow-travellers; and as, in consequence, she had no indulgences to give up, she showed herself very grateful for the one which was granted her, namely, that of sitting for an hour or an hour and a half every evening, under the hedge of seringas in her aunt's garden, where her greatest delight was to read in one of her dearly beloved books, or to think of him who had left so much deeper an impression on her memory than any thing or person besides whom she had as yet met with.

* * * * *

“My dear Emerentia, I am much pleased with your daughter.” It was in these words that Mistress Regina Sophia was pleased to open the conversation, when she one day, for the first time, visited her sister in her own room where the latter was busily occupied in mending dressing gowns for Patrick's warehouse.

“Well, I *am* delighted at that,” replied Madame von Kühlen, surprised and pleased at so gracious an address.

“Yes, I may even say that I am *extremely* pleased with her: she can stitch a shirt, and do it well, in two days; and she sits still in her chair, and does not find some pretext for going to the window or out of the room every minute, as is the way with many young girls. Moreover, she has never asked to go anywhere beyond the garden, nor shown the least vexation because she had no other amusement.”

“Oh! how should that occur to her?”

“It is well that it did not. I like to see people patient and contented, until I think fit to speak, for I always have a reason for what I do.”

“I am persuaded of that, but—”

“But what?”

“We have now been a burden to you for a fortnight; and I think it would be but right that we should begin to keep house for ourselves.”

“It is better that you should wait to do that until you have laid by a little money. I will tell you when I wish to have nothing extra cooked for dinner. But now listen to me; I have something to tell you.”

Madame von Kühlen looked up and thought she detected a smile of somewhat doubtful meaning upon her sister's lips.

"What do you think of that?" and Mistress Regina Sophia tossed down three small open notes upon the table.

"What should I think, dear sister? I know nothing about those notes as yet."

"You understand, Emerentia, that if I wish to deal with Blenda in all respects as with my own daughter, of course it can only be out of kindness to her."

"Of course."

"And any one who undertakes such a responsibility must of necessity lay claim to certain privileges. . . . But perhaps you may feel offended at my taking half the burden off your shoulders."

"I must acknowledge," Emerentia ventured to reply, "that I have never considered it a burden, but rather a great pleasure to guide my little Blenda. . . ."

"To be sure! I ought to have known that! There in the south, in the land of innocence, it probably never occurred to your simplicity that you were called upon to watch over her. It is an easy task, upon my word, to be a mother on such terms!—but we should soon have seen whether the girl would be any the better for such indulgence here in the land of wolves, if no one had thought it incumbent upon them to undertake the neglected responsibility."

"My dear Regina Sophia, I must say I think you do not use me very well. I think—"

"Emerentia, you are a goose. You were one from a child, you are one still, and you will be one till your dying day; and that all comes of the absurd novels that have turned your head! Well, well, of course I should not speak in this way in the hearing of the girl; but truth is truth, and therefore you must put confidence in me, for I know what is what, and that danger is at hand, when young jackanapeses take to pursuing a pretty girl."

"I have seen no signs of danger."

"Well, then, open your eyes and see them—what do you think of these?" and sister Regina Sophia directed an angry glance towards the three notes which she had flung upon the table.

"Why, I do not know what they contain."

"But I know; now, listen. This is the first, which is directed to you. . . ."

"And you opened it?"

"Yes, I did; and more than that, I have answered it."

"Answered it?"

"Yes; because mine has always been a respectable house, and I will suffer no under-hand proceedings to be carried on in it."

And Mistress Regina Sophia opened the first note, and read as follows:—

"DEAR MADAME VON KÜHLEN,

"Having called upon you several times in vain, in order to pay my respects to you and your daughter, I now take the liberty of doing so in writing.

"My object in calling was, in the first place,

to thank you for the pleasure afforded me during my journey, by the most agreeable society I was ever privileged to enjoy; and, secondly, to request the honour of being permitted to escort you and your daughter to the pleasure party at Drottningholm, which will take place next Sunday, and where there will be dancing. The steamer, with a military band on board, will start at two o'clock; and should I not be so fortunate as to obtain leave to accompany you from your own abode, I would patiently await your coming on the new bridge.

"In the hope of a favourable answer, which I will call for this evening, I have the honour to remain,

"Your most obedient,

"J. G. BORN."

"Dear me! how very kind of the Royal Secretary! . . . On Sunday—Good gracious!—why, that is to-morrow!"

Poor Madame von Kühlen was instantly recalled to a sense of her dependent position by a short laugh, and a look of compassion from her sister.

"Ah, to be sure! It is easy to see what steps you would have taken in your short-sightedness; and no doubt you will think it a sad pity when I tell you, that it is not to-morrow, but last Sunday that you were invited to the pleasure-party. But now you shall hear my answer to this officious proposal."

The despotic old lady fumbled in the pocket of her apron, which contained the second portion of the correspondence, produced the rough copy of the answer, and read, in a tone of triumph, as follows:—

"ESTEEMED SIR,

"The house inhabited by my sister and her daughter belongs to me, the widow of a respectable citizen; and as they here enjoy all the protection of which they stand in need, Madame von Kühlen, after consulting me on the subject, begs to return thanks to you for your kind proposal, which she must, however decline to accept.

"REGINA SOPHIA THORMAN.

"P. S.—The discontinuance of your visits will oblige."

"Well, what do you say to that? Do you think I have acted the part of a conscientious aunt towards Blenda, or do you suppose any respectable man would ever think of casting his eyes upon her, if she had acquired the reputation of a dissipated gad-about?"

"Good heavens!"

"Yes, good heavens indeed! Do you suppose that if you were seen in public with a young man who would, of course, think of nothing except paying court to her, the girl would have a rag of reputation left?"

Poor Madame von Kühlen turned quite pale with terror. She was forced to confess, and she did so honestly, that her ignorance of the world might possibly lead her into error; and as she had penetration enough to understand

what was required of her, she put her pride in her pocket, and meekly thanked her sister for her care.

"Very good," said Madame Thorman, quite pacified. . . . "Now we come to number two.

"DEAR MADAME VON KÜHLEN,"

(I have a much worse opinion of this one, because he cloaks his designs under an apparent anxiety to serve you.)

"I called at your abode both last Tuesday and the preceding Saturday, without being admitted; but, as this probably arose from some mistake, I hasten to assure you in writing, that I have done all in my power to fulfil my promise.

"Three of my relations, Countess C., Baroness H., and the wife of Privy-Councillor P., have promised to furnish your daughter with so much employment in the way of embroidery, as to render it unnecessary for her to apply to any one else. The Countess, to whom I spoke in the first instance, is in a hurry for some work, and I have undertaken to present Mademoiselle Blenda to her to-morrow. I will therefore do myself the honour of coming to your house at twelve o'clock, to fetch my beautiful *protégée*.

"Permit me to express to you how much pleasure it affords me to have it in my power to be of any service to you, and to remain,

"Yours faithfully,
"J. T-SWARD."

"But, my dear sister, there is surely no harm in that!" interposed Madame von Kühlen, raising her head. "The Baron is very kind, and has kept his word better than I expected; and if the Countess and the Baroness and Mrs. P. are so good as to receive my daughter—"

"—You would allow her to be seen parading the streets with a—a—well, never mind what! Emerentia, if you really are in your sound senses, you are more stupid than any one has a right to be."

"What do you mean?"

"Cannot you understand, that your Baron's anxiety to serve you is merely a pretext in order to place himself on a footing of greater familiarity with the girl? If his intentions had really been honourable, he would have begged the Countess to visit her herself, or at any rate, to send a woman to her."

Madame von Kühlen was silent. She felt that for the second time her sister had the best of the argument.

"And did you answer him?" stammered she at length.

"Yes; I answered him. Listen."

"BARON—As I am the aunt of the young girl in whose behalf you have given yourself so much trouble, I take the liberty of informing you, that although, in her childish simplicity and ignorance of the world, she may have gladly accepted your promise to procure work for her, this must now be considered as quite at an end, since I have informed

her that such recommendations from young gentlemen are not desirable.

"Requesting you to spare yourself the exertion of either calling or writing again, I have the honour to remain,

"Your obedient servant,
"REGINA SOPHIA THORMAN."

Madame von Kühlen did not venture to open her mouth, and Regina Sophia, who interpreted her silence as implying approbation, proceeded to note number three.

"This, you must know, is to Blenda herself, and written in a tone of such impudent familiarity, that I could spit in the face of the jackanapes who wrote it. Only listen to it:

"DEAR DIVINE MADEMOISELLE BLENDA,

(Oh, if I could only catch you!)"

This note was from the Lieutenant, and if my readers will recollect, that he believed Blenda to be as much captivated by him as he was by her, they will not be astonished at his style.—

"In despair at my ill-luck ten times repeated—for I have called upon you ten times in vain—I at last take up my pen to tell you, that I can no longer endure this cruelty, which is as unexpected as it is undeserved.

"Have you come to this lovely city, this scene of gaiety and pleasure, in order to bury yourself in the seclusion of a cloister—or have you fallen into the clutches of some cross old duenna, who selfishly seeks to conceal you from the gaze of the admiring world? If such be the case, I would entreat you to show yourself no less ingenious than are the Spanish *doñas* in circumventing their duennas.

"I am dying of impatience to show you a multitude of beautiful sights, which I am sure would delight you. If, therefore, you and your excellent mother—who is far too unprejudiced to have any prudery—will give me the great pleasure of meeting me about four o'clock next Friday afternoon, in the western alley of Charles the Thirteenth's Square, I will take you to the Royal Park (Thiergarten), where we will spend a delightful afternoon. We can then see the performance at the hippodrome, and sup at the Blue Door.*

"I will send early to-morrow morning for the answer; but I entreat you not to refuse my request. The most humble and

"Obedient of your admirers,
"E. S."

"Would you like to expose your daughter to any thing worse than this? or do you think that such language is honourable? Do you see the character you have acquired? You are 'too unprejudiced to have any prudery.'"

Poor Madame von Kühlen began to sob. The lesson was a severe one; but this letter at any rate removed the bandage of self-delusion from her eyes. "How right the Captain was," cried she, "and how good a friend he was to us poor women!"

"What is that about the Captain?"

* A well known Restaurant, at the entrance of the Thiergarten.

Emerentia, in reply, told her sister how the Captain of the steamer had watched over Blenda, and constantly discouraged the attentions of the young gentlemen.

"God bless the worthy soul!" exclaimed Regina Sophia; "I must go myself down to the quay some day, and thank him . . . but now you shall hear the answer I sent to the young scamp."

"Sir,—The note which you had the audacity to address to a respectable young woman, whose ignorance of the world ought to have been her most effectual safeguard, has fallen into the hands of the cross old duenna, who takes the liberty of informing you, that if you ever again set foot in her house, you will have to do with one who will undertake to teach you what people of good character have a right to expect from each other.

"REGINA SOPHIA THORMAN."

"Thank you, thank you, my dearest sister! You have acted like our best friend, as indeed you are. . . . May I tell Blenda of this?"

"Not a word! Her childish vanity might be flattered that such a piece of work should have been made on her account. . . . Now I have disposed of all three, and I am in daily expectation of the fourth."

"The fourth?"

"Yes, another has been here nearly every day, and no doubt he will soon have recourse to writing, like the rest."

Madame von Kühlen who was afraid that it might possibly be "the Count," did not venture to ask a single question. In this case, it was necessary to await the event; for perhaps it might only be the commercial traveller, the same who had appeared, on board the steamer, to be more serious in his attentions than any of the others.

"Heaven forbid," thought she, "that I should arouse the slumbering lion! My sister must not on any account have the slightest inkling of that which took place at Wenersborg."

"Now you must know," resumed Mistress Regina Sophia, "that it is my wish to reward Blenda for her patience and good-humour. My son, the linen-draper,—or I should rather say my daughter-in-law,—has a little villa in the direction of Liljenholm; really a very pretty little place; and, as a good many gentlefolks have villas in that neighbourhood, those who are acquainted frequently meet at one another's houses. Such amusements are very suitable for young people, and so I have written to Henrietta, to tell her that we will come out and dine with her to-morrow."

Madame von Kühlen's eyes sparkled with pleasure at this information.

"But do you think we have any clothes in which we can go there, without your having cause to be ashamed of us? My niece Henrietta is so—so—"

"Never you mind Henrietta; she is not so bad in the main, though rather proud and stiff-necked she certainly is. But I am as stiff-necked as she is, and she knows it. As to

the rest, if she chooses to dress herself up like a puppet in the *journal des modes*, that concerns nobody but herself and her husband. You and Blenda must of course dress according to your circumstances."

"That is true;"—the words were accompanied with a slight sigh.

"I will take care that you shall at any rate have a pretty mourning-cap, and you can borrow a black silk shawl from me. I shall have a word to say to the child before we set out to-morrow; maybe I have got something for her too. And now good-bye, and do not forget to thank God that you have got a cross old sister to give you a helping hand in case of need!"

"Upon my word there is little chance of my forgetting that!" muttered Madame von Kühlen to herself; but no sooner were the words uttered, than her warm heart reproached her for the tinge of bitterness which they contained.

CHAPTER X.

A PROPOSAL.

THE conversation above recorded took place while Blenda was gone out for her accustomed evening walk with Mrs. Deborah, from which they returned just in time to meet the mistress of the house in the passage.

"What have you under your shawl, child?" asked she, observing, with some astonishment, Blenda's rising colour, as her niece handed her a book, without uttering a word in reply."

Aunt Regina Sophia held up her forefinger menacingly and shook her head; she took the book, however.

"Why, what is this? Ken—Kenil—Kenilworth. Heaven help you; you little crocodile! do you spend the time in which you ought to be gathering vigour, both of mind and body, over such wretched stuff as this. Fye! I had a better opinion of you!"

"My dear Aunt, when I have a leisure hour, surely I ought to employ it as pleasantly as I can."

"You think so, do you?"

"Yes, indeed, Aunt, and if you knew how much I enjoy sitting in the arbour and reading, I am sure you would not object to my spending my time as I do. These historical events are quite new to me."

"Historical! fine history indeed! all love and nonsense."

"Oh, no, dear Aunt! It is quite another sort of thing; at least a great deal of it is."

A secret sign from Deborah, made behind Blenda's back, induced her Aunt to bring the conversation to a close, which she did by saying: "Very well, child, you may go. I will look at the book myself another time."

Blenda needed no second bidding, for she longed to spend a few minutes more with Lord Leicester, the beautiful Amy Robsart, and Queen Elizabeth's intriguing court.

"Well, Deborah, why do you stand there making grimaces, while I am cross-questioning my niece?" asked her mistress, as she withdrew with the housekeeper into her bed-room.

"My reason, Ma'am, was this: that you had better let the young lady sit and pore over her stories as much as ever she likes."

"What can you be thinking of, Deborah?"

"As long as her eyes are busy with her book, she can see nothing else."

"Oho!" exclaimed Mistress Regina Sophia, "then I suppose the poachers have found the scent?"

"Just so; only *one* of them, however; but one may be more than enough."

"Which is it?"

"The one who has not yet written."

"Where have you seen him?"

"For two or three evenings I had noticed somebody walking outside the paling, but as it is too high to look over it, I did not give the matter another thought."

"Well?"

"This evening, when she—little modest thing! after taking a turn or two along the walks, went and sate down in the arbour with her book, and I had moved away a little, some one knocked gently against the palings."

"They did, did they? I wish I had been there."

"No doubt the person fancied I was a good way off; for when Miss Blenda went on reading without taking any notice, the knocking was repeated more loudly, and was accompanied by a low cough. Upon that I went up to the place, peeped through the chink, and recognised the man, who knew me too in a minute."

"Well, and what did he do?"

"He ran off as fast as he could."

"That girl is as lovely as an angel, and is exposed to great dangers and temptations. Do you know, Deborah, I wish with all my heart that I could secure an efficient protector for her; and who knows—there are some young men who do not consider money to be everything."

Mrs. Deborah thought she could not possibly allow herself to understand this allusion; for how could she, who was acquainted with all the family secrets, and held the daughter of her former mistress in such high esteem, be the accomplice of a plan, which, if anything came of it, would prove the bitterest blow that could be dealt to the proud Henrietta? for, in her own opinion at least, Deborah was perfectly aware where the shoe pinched.

*

*

That evening, Aunt Regina Sophia asked to see the book. Having turned over the leaves, however, and found no mawkish or unseemly love passages, but many things which appeared to her sensible, serious, and altogether commendable, she gave it back to Blenda, telling her that she was welcome to read it when she was in the garden, and took that opportunity of informing her niece of the treat in store for her on the following day, at which Blenda was, however, by no means delighted—though of course she did not venture to say so—as her

affectionate heart was continually wounded by Henrietta's cold and arrogant manner.

The next morning was bright and beautiful. They were to start at twelve o'clock; and about ten Aunt Regina Sophia, in better humour than she had been for a long time, had begun to draw forth from her drawers various small articles intended for "the child," when Deborah entered, with a look almost of alarm, to say that "the gentleman behind the palings," or Mr. A., a commercial traveller, as he styled himself, had called, and begged to speak to Mrs. Thorman.

"Well, I declare! May be he has come to complain that he is not permitted to visit my sister. Ask him to walk in." And with these words, and a look that indicated her resolution not to make the slightest concession, Aunt Regina Sophia entered the parlour, where she was presently joined by the individual in question.

Mr. A., a well-looking man, with an air of self-confidence which freed him from all appearance of embarrassment, bowed with easy politeness to his hostess, who put on her spectacles, in order the better to inspect him.

"Oh! you are the gentleman who wishes to speak to me. Pray be seated."

"Although I have not the pleasure of your acquaintance, I have taken the liberty of calling upon you in consequence of a circumstance which I shall have the honour . . . but I hope I do not intrude at an inconvenient moment."

"Why, as to that, I do not exactly know; for in the first place it is church-time, and in the next, I had intended driving this morning into the country."

"I am very sorry to have chosen my time so inopportunistically, but I did so from necessity. I shall detain you but a few moments."

"So much the better."

"It so happened that yesterday evening, as I was stand—walking . . . in short—"

"Go on!"

"As I happened to be passing by your garden . . ."

"Yes, and knocked at the paling in order to attract the attention of my niece."

"Oh!"

"That you were so unfortunate as to attract only that of my old housekeeper, who came and looked through the chink."

"I felt quite certain beforehand," returned Mr. A. with a smile, which showed that he had already recovered his self-possession, "that this would have been reported to you; but the very fact of my coming myself to confirm the truth of the statement, ought to afford you convincing proof of the honourable nature of my intentions."

"I do not see that there is anything honourable in tracking the footsteps of a young girl, and endangering her reputation; for you must be aware that if any of the neighbours had happened to pass, they could have been at no loss to guess your object in knocking."

"But, dear madam, if this was a imprudence on my part, I was driven to it by the impossibility of seeing your niece in any other way."

"What is it that you want with her?"

"I wish to endeavour to secure her regard; for she has already riveted my affection, and although it was not my intention to declare myself upon so very short an acquaintance, I now see myself compelled to do so, in order to vindicate my conduct from all suspicion."

"Oh! So you wish to marry the child? And pray what have you got to marry upon? Can you prove to me that you are in a condition to maintain a wife?"

"No at present, certainly; but in two, or at the utmost, three years, I hope to have quite sufficient, with what I have already laid by, to support a family; and as the young lady and myself are both young, I think that the delay of a few years need not necessarily be an obstacle to the fulfilment of my wishes."

Aunt Regina Sophia coughed. "I will give you my opinion plainly," said she, "and it is that you had better put off wooing till you are able to wed."

"And why so?"

"Because long engagements, courtships, quarrels, and reconciliations, are a bad thing for a man who ought to have a clear head for his business."

"But, my dear madam, nothing in the world is more common than an engagement of two or three years' duration. Moreover, I do not wish to ask the young lady's consent at once. All that I desire is to be permitted to see her now and then at her aunt's house. I am constantly travelling, and do not come more than three or four times in a year to Stockholm, so that I have very little time left for all that to which you so much object."

"What you say is reasonable, and honourably spoken—that I cannot deny; so I suppose I must ask Blenda whether she would like to see you here sometimes. If she does, I have no right to stand in your way; and you may come now and then and have a little chat with her, in my presence or that of some other person, without either party being in any way bound however Meanwhile, I intend making some enquiries concerning you, and if you choose to come again next Tuesday, I will give you a more positive answer."

The suitor thereupon gave the directions of several people who could afford information concerning his character and circumstances, and then Aunt Regina Sophia rose and bowed a dismissal to the young man, whose beaming countenance showed him to be already in the seventh heaven. He did not even dream of a refusal.

CHAPTER XL

TWO SURPRISES.

No sooner was the visitor departed, than Blenda came tripping down the stairs, warbling like a bird.

The evening before, she had felt but little pleasure in the prospect of the excursion;

but that morning she felt fresh and gay, and the sun shone brightly, as if to invite her to go forth into the open air.

Besides, we cannot deny that another trifling circumstance had contributed to raise Blenda's spirit: for that very morning, as she was reading her beloved Kenilworth, she had stumbled upon an underlined passage. Who could have underlined it except the donor? and why was this particular passage selected? It was on the subject of trustfulness and constancy.

Blenda could not answer this question; but her spirits received a stimulus which reacted upon her whole being.

"Come hither, you little singing-bird, I have something to say to you;" cried her aunt from her own room.

Blenda entered the room, but remained standing, silent and motionless, almost believing that she must be in a dream.

There stood Aunt Regina Sophia, holding in one hand a light and elegant *barège* dress, and in the other a violet-coloured parasol—Blenda's first parasol—upon the point of which hung a little Tuscan straw hat.

"Well, child, what say you to this outfit?—will it do?"

"Dear Aunt, I can hardly venture to look at it."

"Your bombazine gown is very nice, but as you have but that one both for Sundays and week-days, I thought this might not be unacceptable."

Blenda thereupon did what no one else could have ventured to do to the stern woman without her becoming seriously angry, and vehemently expressing her aversion to scenes, affectations, and exaggerations of all sorts; namely, she flung herself on her knees before the aunt to whom she had at first done such injustice, clasped her arms around her, and laughing and crying at once, exclaimed,—

"Oh, how very happy I am! Such an aunt, and such a gown!—such a parasol!—such a hat!" And while she kissed, by turns, the hand of Aunt Regina Sophia and the parasol, the most splendid of her gifts, she whispered, "Believe me, though, dear Aunt when I say, that it is your affection which makes me the happiest of all."

"Get up, child, get up, you little goose, and let me tell you that it is your submissive disposition which pleases me in you."

"Then you really like me, dear Aunt?"

"Yes, for you are a good girl; go on being as industrious, modest, and gentle as you have been hitherto, and be sure that your confidence in me will not bring you to shame."

"And you shall see, my dear good Aunt, that I will be a credit to you. Now, may I go and dress? My only fear is lest the gown should not fit."

"Never fear, the measure was taken without your knowledge from one you have got on. But I am curious to hear what you will say when I tell you that I have had a visit this morning on your account."

"On my account!"

Full as she was of the underlined passage in the book, Blenda was on the point of exclaiming, "the Count!" but, fortunately, she restrained herself, and waited, though blushing crimson, for her Aunt to speak.

"It was from the Commercial Traveller who was with you on board the steamer!"

"Oh, the Commercial Traveller!"

The manifest indifference of the tone in which these words were uttered, delighted Aunt Regina Sophia, who, as we know, cherished her own little secret plans.

"Your blushing made me think that you had guessed; but I know that a modest girl is ready to blush at the very idea of any one having a design upon her liberty."

"Is that what Mr. A. wants?" asked Blenda, with childish curiosity.

"I had not intended talking to you about it until to-morrow; but as I see that you take it in a way that I very much approve, I may as well tell you at once that he has been here several times without seeing you."

"Indeed!"

"And, moreover, that he has been lying in wait for you by the garden rails; but as he could not succeed, he has had recourse to me, and has asked my leave to come here occasionally, and see you in my presence."

"Is that all?"

"Child, do you not understand that when a man asks thus much of a girl, he purposes asking her to be his wife?"

"No, Aunt, I did not know that."

"If he obtains leave to try his fortune—"

"What then?"

"That would be a kind of tacit encouragement. His intentions are honourable, and he wishes to marry you in a few years' time."

"If that is the case, dear Aunt, he had better not be allowed to come."

"Then you mean that you would not accept him?"

"If he only wished to come here and chat with me, I should have been willing enough, for he is very agreeable and amusing; but if I were to be in any way *bound* by that, I would rather give up the pleasure of his company."

"My dear child, you had better think it over before you decide. Such honourable proposals do not often fall to the lot of a poor girl."

"I will think it over as long as you like, dear Aunt, but my answer will always be the same; and if I should never have another offer, I can console myself with the thought that I have at least had one."

"I am more and more pleased with you, my child. I thought that, young as you are, and with your head stuffed full of novels, you would have been ready to jump at the first man who talked to you of love."

"Oh, Aunt!"

"I am glad that you know better. I will take upon myself to give Mr. A. his answer,—that is, when you have consulted your mother; for she is, of course, the first person who has a right to be heard in this matter. But now, as you have been so candid

with respect to the Commercial Traveller, tell me, upon your conscience, whether you would have answered differently had it been any of your other fellow-passengers?"

"I assure you, dear Aunt, that I felt nothing whatever with regard to any of them, except the pleasure of being noticed, and of enjoying some cheerful conversation."

"I am delighted to hear it."

"But, dear Aunt, as you have been so frank with me, I will be no less so with you, and will tell you that my mother has never been used to keep the least thing a secret from me; and so I know all about it—the visits, the notes, and your prudence, dear Aunt, in freeing me from such dangerous acquaintances. I begin now to understand many things which I never understood before; and I promise you," added she, drawing herself up with a little look of pride that became her very well, "that in future no one shall be misled through my simplicity."

"That is right, my little girl; and, as you express yourself so properly on the subject, I shall certainly not reproach my sister for having told you. The best thing is, that we should all understand one another . . . But now, child, go and dress; we have dawdled so, that we shall only be in time for the boat that starts at one. But, no matter; Mrs. Henrietta does not dine till half-past two."

And Blenda bounded upstairs.

CHAPTER XII.

A PARTY OF PLEASURE.

It was a gay and delightful prospect which was presented to the eye across the whole extent of the Melar from the Riddarholm; for, at midday, it was covered with innumerable little boats and sails, crossing each other in all directions, as far as the distant sunny shores, the favourite resort of all the sea-loving population of Stockholm.

Blenda, as *élégante* as a real Stockholm lady, and looking so lovely that, to the secret pride and gratification of Aunt Regina Sophia, every one turned round to look at her, was seated in the little boat, whose revolving paddles afforded her immense amusement.

But she soon forgot the machinery in contemplation of the view, in which the splendid monuments of art combined to enhance the beauties of nature. First her eyes rested on Stinarwiksberg; the Königholms Church rose up behind it; Marienberg was gleaming at a greater distance; then Stromborg appeared beyond them; until at length the boat reached the beautiful Langholmsvik.

"You are very happy, are you not, my Blenda?" said her mother smiling. "This is quite one of the delightful days of which we used to dream, when we thought of rest after our work."

"Oh, but this is much more delightful,

dear mother! I cannot tell you how I feel: I am so happy and astonished, and at the same time a little sad, that such a passage must come to an end so soon."

"Dear Blenda," said Aunt Regina Sophia, "it is quite long enough."

"Long enough!"

"Pray do not be so excited at the sight of water, and trees, and green hills; or do you know what Henrietta will call you?"

"No; do tell me!"

"The little country simpleton."

"Would she indeed?"

"Yes; now you know the nickname that she bestowed upon you the very first time she saw you; . . . so take care that you do not justify it. No doubt it is very well to be innocent in some things; but . . ."

"Do not be afraid, dear Aunt, I will give her no excuse for calling me a country simpleton."

"That's right."

"But she may perhaps do so all the same. And now that we are on that subject, you desired that we should call each other by our christian names, as is usual between cousins, but she has never done so to me, and seemed to avoid calling me anything. I must say I was hurt; and so now I had rather call her Mrs. Patrick."

"No, child, that will never do! If when John comes home he finds that Henrietta has been so absurd, she will have mighty little reason to be pleased."

"Does she look up much to her brother-in-law?"

"Does she look up to John? yes, that she does! and he cannot bear people to be insolent or purse-proud; . . . but Henrietta is not bad in the main; she is a good little daughter-in-law, and Patrick is very happy."

The conversation was here interrupted by the stopping of the boat at Langholm to land some passengers and take others on board; and during the remainder of the voyage Blenda was so absorbed in the delight of looking about her, that her companions would not disturb her enjoyment until they came in sight of the summer retreat of Mr. and Mrs. Patrick Thorman, embosomed in woods and flower-gardens.

"Look there, Blenda," cried her aunt; "look there! what say you to that confectionary house, there, above the bridge, amongst the green beeches?"

"Oh, what a lovely place!"

"That is Henrikslund, which Henrietta inherited from her parents. . . . Ah, there comes Patrick over the bridge. Good lad! he is always glad to see his mother. How pleased he looks!"

The boat now touched the shore.

Our good friend Patrick, who was very smartly got up in a green coat, white trousers, and a variegated neck-handkerchief, received his mother with open arms, and then shook hands with his aunt, his cousin, and lastly with Mrs. Deborah.

"Well, and where is my daughter-in-law?"

asked Mrs. Thorman. But before Patrick could reply, Henrietta was seen hastening down the slope, her white gown and long cap ribbons fluttering around her. The young wife was so pretty, so gracious, so smiling, that no one could choose but forget her usual expression of scornful pride, which indeed, having by long habit become almost natural to her, made her present sunshiny gaiety but the more attractive.

Like all other people, however, Henrietta had her bright days; and if the latter sometimes coincided with her opportunities of receiving the attention and admiration of her small social circle, we must not judge her too severely, for her good-humour was much to the advantage of those around her.

"My goodness! my little daughter-in-law, you are a positive sunbeam to-day—your eyes are quite sparkling!" exclaimed her mother-in-law. "Poor Patrick! if all that fire is aimed at him, I am afraid he will be altogether burnt up."

"Oh, I am burnt up and roasted already," cried Patrick, laughing, "for Henrietta insisted on going out walking this morning, and left me to wait for her a whole hour in the sun!"

"Nonsense, my dear Patrick; how can you keep your mother and her party standing here in the heat, when we can offer them seats in the cool verandah!"

"Oh!" replied Mrs. Thorman, "it is very pleasant here under the trees—your verandah—by which I suppose you mean that long rickety-looking sentry box, with the boughs through it, that you have stuck in front of the house—cannot be as cool."

"I thought you, Mother, and these ladies might be thirsty, and besides, dinner will be ready very soon."

"You are very kind, very attentive—well, let us go into the verandah!"

The party ascended the steps to the verandah, covered with climbing plants, which adjoined the house, which, with its glass-doors opening towards the sea, its windows decorated with flowers, and the good taste with which it was arranged, had a very attractive appearance.

Both Madame von Kühlen and her daughter stood still at the entrance, transfixed with astonishment and admiration. The difference between them was, that the mother's eyes were riveted upon the furniture and decorations, while Blenda stood silent, with her hands folded, and an expression of almost devotional contemplation, absorbed in the prospect of sea and land that met her gaze.

"Only look at our little innocence, our little simpleton!—what a face of devout contemplation!" cried Henrietta, gaily. "I do not know what I would give to be able to call up such a look!"

"Is it I," replied Blenda, turning quickly round, "whom you call little simpleton?"

"Why, bless me! in what a tone she asks,—one would think I had been guilty of a

deadly sin!" cried Henrietta, bursting into a noisy laugh.

At this jest, not so mortifying from the words themselves as from the tone in which they were uttered, a colour deep as that of the cactus suffused Blenda's velvet cheeks. Her soft eyes assumed an expression of pride and coldness; and, under the influence of a feeling very unusual with her—that of displeasure—she gave Henrietta a reply which the latter remembered long afterwards with no small vexation.

"I do not know whether it be a deadly sin to turn a poor inexperienced girl into an object of ridicule; but this I know, that I am not so simple as to consent, by my silence, to be treated as such."

On hearing such words from her modest and gentle Blenda, poor Madame von Kühlen's consternation was so great, that she felt as if she must have sunk into the earth—her only distinct thought was, "What will my sister say?"

She was not long kept in suspense on that subject, however; for Aunt Regina Sophia laughed, and winked her eyes,—a sure sign that she was pleased. "Well, upon my word, only listen to the child: she is quite able to stand up for herself. That is right, my little Blenda; defend yourself manfully when Henrietta drives you into a corner!"

"I was not aware," said Mrs. Patrick, with a slight toss of her head, "that ladies from the provinces were so very sensitive; but I will take good care not to jest with the young lady another time."

"Oh, you are welcome to jest with me as much as ever you like," cried Blenda, cordially extending her hand to her cousin; "only do not turn me into ridicule, Henrietta, for that hurts me so much, that I feel I am no longer like myself."

The frank good nature of Blenda's manner, as she for the first time addressed her cousin in this tone of intimacy, was so disarming, that, for the moment at least, Henrietta was conquered; and kissing Blenda's cheek, she replied smiling,—

"You are a pert little girl, and that is what I shall call you, since you will not hear of being my little rustic simpleton."

"You may call me anything you like in such a tone as that.—Oh, Henrietta, how attractive you can be!"

CHAPTER XIII.

COMPANY.

AFTER an excellent dinner, eaten under the shade of an arbour, the party sat down to wait for the neighbours who were to make up their number.

While Blenda was enjoying the perfume of the beautiful flowers which Patrick had gathered for her, and reflecting how she had

better behave when the expected company should arrive, Aunt Regina Sophia said to her daughter-in-law,—“The strong smell of the roses, and the murmuring of the branches and of the waves, make me a little sleepy; so do you talk to me, Henrietta,—that is no trouble to you,—and tell me whom you are expecting.—But are you already gone to sleep, sister Emerentia?”

“I! oh dear no! I am as wide awake as possible.”

This was strictly true; for, like Blenda, the good soul was full of the thought of her first appearance in society; and as she recollected to have somewhere read that silence and thoughtfulness were indicative of cultivation and good sense, she determined to let no one excel her in these respects. Her reserve would, besides, be easily accounted for by her mourning attire; and she would have the advantage of learning and observing, without the risk of laying herself open to ridicule.

“We expect nobody,” was Henrietta's reply, to her stepmother, “except those who usually constitute our social circle here during the summer.”

“And how should I know who they are!”

“I think you are acquainted with Lorenz, the silk merchant; and with Haleberg too, I believe.”

“What, the huckster?”

“Yes, the wealthy huckster. Then we have the looking-glass manufacturer Lundgren, the privy councillor Ahlsten, and—let me think—perhaps we may have Cederlund, the hat-dresser, Bruhn, the butcher—all with their families; and probably also Mrs. Wolf-smidt, the widow of Colonel Wolfsmidt, who is the *doyenne* of our little set.”

“And the young Chamberlain,* dear Henrietta—you forgot him,” interposed Patrick.

“And who is he?” asked his mother.

“Mrs. Wolfsmidt's son; he comes out once or twice a week, and almost always makes his appearance here to sing with Henrietta.”

“Perhaps you would like to have coffee brought!” asked Henrietta; “that will really be the only way of passing the time.”

Meanwhile, the aristocratic Madame von Kühlen was pondering over the extraordinary intermixture of rank amongst the guests. She was accustomed only to the narrow and exclusive limitations of provincial society, and could not conceive how a huckster, a hat-dresser—whose calling she of course interpreted literally†—and even a butcher, could mingle in society with colonels' widows, chamberlains, and privy councillors. The worthy woman had indeed heard of the

* Gentleman of the Bedchamber would be more correct. I have chosen chamberlain for convenience; it must be understood in the sense in which it is used in many foreign courts, as by no means an exclusive dignity.—*Translator*.

† In Sweden, those who sell articles of ornament and luxury, of all descriptions, (*marchands de galanteries*) are called *Hatstofferare*, literally hat-dressers; a peculiar designation, which it was necessary to preserve in the translation.

influence of wealth; but she had never imagined that it could work such miracles.

While Henrietta, without awaiting her mother-in-law's reply, hastened away to order the coffee, Madame von Kühlen took advantage of the opportunity to ask her sister, whether in Stockholm the trades of a *hatter* and a *hat-dresser* were distinct.

"What are you thinking of? Are you gone crazy? Why, a hat-dresser has nothing on earth to do with a hatter. Do you not know that my son John is a hat-dresser?"

"Oh! I believe you once wrote something of the kind; but I thought perhaps I had not read the word right."

"To be sure you did; and I assure you, that John's business is on a very extensive scale."

"But what is it that they sell?" asked Madame von Kühlen, very glad to obtain this information.

"Everything you can think of. You shall come with me some day to my son's warehouse, and there you will see military accoutrements, chandeliers, table ornaments, perfumery, and all those kind of things."

Poor Madame von Kühlen was quite bewildered. So, hat-dressing, and selling all kinds of articles of luxury, meant one and the same thing at Stockholm; and more than all, hat-dressing did not imply dressing hats, but selling chandeliers, table ornaments, military accoutrements, and perfumery.

Before she could reduce this chaos of ideas to anything like order, a party of strangers had arrived—and lo! and behold, the brilliantly-attired ladies, who looked as well as any heroine in La Fontaine's or Kotzebue's romances need have wished to do, were no other than the wives of the wealthy butcher, huckster, and hat-dresser—the latter of whom in particular excelled even Henrietta herself in grace and elegance.

* * * *

In another hour the whole party was assembled, with the exception of the colonel's widow; and while coffee was being handed round, a conversation began by which Blenda was no less bewildered than her mother had been, by her previous discoveries. For poor Blenda was not acquainted with any of the news of the day, or with the names of any one of the actors or singers in repute, and had very limited ideas concerning the watering places, and none at all concerning the Order of Swea, or of Thalia, and this and that and t'other Society, or the concerts, soirées and fêtes in the garden of Kirstein, &c. &c. &c. It was still worse, when any of the ladies spoke to her, for then it was always, "Have you seen? Have you heard? Have you been to such and such a place?" And when Blenda answered, blushing, that she had not seen anything yet, except the beautiful town itself, and a small portion of its neighbourhood, the ladies were kind enough to describe to her so many things, in so incomprehensible a manner, that she could not understand one quarter of what they said; and all this while

their knitting-needles moved with such rapidity, that Blenda was tempted to think they moved of themselves, and this moreover was on Sunday—our little rustic maiden was under sentence of perpetual astonishment!

The gentlemen, meanwhile, who appeared far less conversable than the ladies, had retired to cigars and punch in the verandah.

The party had given up all hope of seeing the Colonel's widow that afternoon, and the ladies were thinking of taking a walk, when Henrietta—who appeared rather restless, and constantly found something or other within the house which required her attention—was greeted, on her return from one of these domestic excursions, with the information that the Chamberlain and his mother were in sight.

Whatever might be the peculiar attractions of these two individuals, they must have been very remarkable in degree, for this announcement seemed to cause a slight electric shock to every one of the ladies present; always excepting Blenda and her mother..

The Colonel's widow was neither more nor less than a kind and worthy old lady, who was well pleased to occupy the foremost place in the little social circle, which bestowed its incense upon her with no niggard hand.

Her son, the Chamberlain, on the other hand, was a young man of polished manners, who amused himself with burning incense before the ladies in his turn. He had a way of talking which they one and all considered exceedingly captivating; and liked the occupation well enough to be never weary of hearing himself speak.

But, to the great displeasure of his admiring audience, he this day was guilty of a decided social error; for scarcely had he carried on his usual strain of graceful and sportive conversation for a quarter of an hour, when he suddenly stopped, and turning, not to Henrietta—who was accustomed to and expected some marks of more exclusive attention from him—but to Blenda, he addressed her with an enquiry concerning the impression produced upon her by the country around Stockholm.

"I am afraid I cannot tell you much about it as yet," replied she, with her pretty laugh; "but I never even dreamed of anything so beautiful."

"Never even dreamed. That is as much as to say that you think dreams always go beyond the reality?"

"I should at least imagine that it must often be the case."

"I prophesy that you will change your opinion hereafter. But may I not hold those Brobdignag daisies for you? Citizens as we are, we know how to pluck daisies, as well as others."

And, to Henrietta's no small displeasure, the Chamberlain sat down beside Blenda, and courteously helped her to hold together the large daisies which she had picked, almost unconsciously, but now willingly gave up to him, because she could speculate as she pulled their petals whether she would

ever see again her Knight of the Black Riband . . . and behold! the Chamberlain brought her good luck—the answer of the daisy was that Blenda's knight would reappear.

"What do these ladies say to our carrying out our intention of taking a walk?" asked the hostess; "it is getting oppressively hot here."

The Colonel's widow, Aunt Regina Sophia, and some of the other ladies, preferred sitting still, and partaking of lemonade and other refreshments, while the younger ones took their walk.

But who was it who did *not* observe that on Henrietta's first attempt to throw her shawl over her shoulders, it nearly fluttered out of her hands? And who was it who arranged Blenda's shawl, which did not flutter at all?—who but the Chamberlain, who afterwards faithfully escorted the country maiden during the walk?

At the turn of a path they found themselves close to Henrietta, the expression of whose eyes caused the Chamberlain to join her, and walk with her a little apart from the rest.

"I am really astonished," said she, drily.

Then followed a few sentences, exchanged in almost whispering tones; Henrietta looked more pacified: "If I could really believe—," said she, raising her voice in conclusion.

"Believe what?"

"That your conduct is the result of discretion, and consideration for me . . ."

"Can you be so cruel as to doubt it?"

CHAPTER XIV.

CORRESPONDENCE.

Mrs. Thorman, to her son Mr. John Blucher at Hamburg.

"MY DEAREST JOHN,

"If you had not begun by reproaching yourself, I should not have failed to have done so for you, and sharply too, for being so undutiful as to keep me waiting thus long for a letter; but there is no use in harping upon a fault already acknowledged; and besides, I know that you love your old mother.

"What say you to the news that you were within an ace of not finding her to welcome you home again?

"Maybe it would have gone to your heart; you that have such a tender one, that really I am ashamed of you. Will you never learn to be a man? But this I tell you, if that should come to pass—which, however, is not likely, as I am now, thank God, stronger than I have been for a long time,—you must not give way like a fool, for although no one in this world can ever love you, my wild lad, better than I do, yet, I make no doubt that you will find some one who will perceive what stuff you are

made of; and between ourselves, I think it is pure gold.

"But I really do not know, my John, why it is that I feel myself compelled to exhort you on this subject. Only promise that when misfortune comes, you will bear up against it manfully, although, God forbid that I should wish you to have no feeling.

"I am very glad to hear that you have reached the good city of Hamburg at last, and that you have prospered in your business.

"Perhaps I had better tell you at once that I wish to speak to you upon a subject to which hitherto you have always turned a deaf ear; but if you do so this time, you will be acting like a fool.

"You must know that my sister, whom I was expecting, arrived upon the day appointed, with her little daughter; and ill as I was that day, I was quite astonished to see such a little angel from Heaven, gentle as a dove, and so innocent, that one hardly knows whether to laugh or to cry at it.

"Henrietta immediately mounted her high horse. I must admit that in the matter of Henrietta you were quite right. But dear John, I have put this girl to the proof, both as regards her needle-work and her character; and take my word for it, she is a pearl of great price. Her poverty is of no consequence, for I say it is a blessing to have such a pious and cheerful-hearted creature by one's fire-side; and the gratitude which she would not fail both to feel and to display, would be a better marriage portion than Henrietta's 50,000 dollars banco.

"Speaking of her meekness, you must not suppose that she has no sense or spirit,—nothing of the kind! you should have heard how she answered Henrietta one day that we dined at their villa, and that she called her 'little rustic,' and 'little simpleton!' I do not remember her words, but they made Henrietta feel that she was in the wrong box; and though at first her manner was rather more cordial to the child, yet it did not come from the heart, as I plainly saw later in the evening.

"You know that at their villa they see a good deal of company, people who meet to chat and gossip together; and the cock of the walk is a young Chamberlain, whom, judging by Henrietta's manner, I strongly suspect of an inclination to flirt with her. That evening, however, he dangled after little Blenda, who fortunately appeared neither embarrassed nor elated by the honour done her. When it was time for us to return, the Chamberlain prepared to accompany us in the paddle-bout, under pretext of business, instead of staying, as he usually does on a Sunday, with his mother, who is a Colonel's widow; and if I had been in doubt before as to Henrietta's ill-will to the girl, I should have been convinced of it then, when she was seized with a sudden fancy to keep her dear Blenda with her for a few days. But I said 'No,' and there was an end of the matter.

"And she a married woman! Heaven help us! I would give her a good lecture if I

thought it was anything more than childishness and vanity; but I shall keep an eye upon her nevertheless. Poor Patrick! he never thinks of such a thing. At any rate I will not trust Blenda in such a school.

"On the passage home, the Chamberlain did all in his power to make himself agreeable; and, amongst other things, he offered to show the new-comers the palace, the royal wardrobe, and the ceremony of investiture of some knights, which was to take place in the course of the week. I saw the poor child's eyes glisten with pleasure, and she looked at me so beseechingly, that I had not the heart to refuse, and so accepted the offer for all three of us. And my goodness, what a comedy those two women were, both before and after the great day!

"My sister seemed just like a teetotum, and Blenda was in the seventh heaven. I really thought the child would faint, when she saw the king, and the new knights, and all the pomp and parade; and I gave her a good sharp pinch, while the Chamberlain opened a smelling-bottle to bring her to herself. I overheard a gentleman whisper quite loud to the Chamberlain, 'That girl is just like one of Raphael's Madonnas.' For my part I have never seen his Madonnas; but the child is very pretty, of that there is no doubt; and most of the men who were there, looked quite as much at her as at the king or the ceremony.

"As for my sister, she was especially delighted with the Royal Wardrobe. I thought she had taken root in front of a glass case, in which was the Queen's wedding-dress; and she uttered such exclamations over some royal baby-clothes, which had been worn by I don't know who, that I was quite ashamed of her.

"The Chamberlain has not been here since; but as I perceive that he makes his horse caracolé past the window, I make Deborah sit at it. Though he has not been here, Henrietta has; she came the day after the investiture of the knights; and when she heard what we had been doing, she looked as sour as verjuice. At first she vented her vexation by slighting observations upon 'little designing coquettes, who were not so simple as they wished to appear;'—but as the child was not in the room I thought it as well to stop my lady's mouth with the hint that the display of so much interest about the Chamberlain might look suspicious; upon which she held her tongue, and swallowed her spite.

"I am sorry, my dear son, that you cannot return before the end of November, for I am really puzzled how to keep guard over the treasure which in my heart I destine for you. I see plainly that, as yet, neither the Chamberlain nor any one else has touched her heart, yet, child as she is, such a thing might happen.

"You must know that on her journey hither, she had a whole tribe of young gentlemen dangling after her. After that, they nearly stormed my house, and sent in a shower of notes; but those I answered, and so got rid of them. One of them, however, a very gentleman-like Commercial Traveller, made a

proposal in due form; this of course I was obliged to communicate to Blenda and to my sister; and, to my surprise, I found them both averse to the match. I could not have supposed but that Emerentia, ready as she is with her castles in the air, would have bitten at the very first bait; but no, she was quite indifferent. And so the Commercial Traveller received a formal refusal, by which I saw that he was mortified as much as he was grieved.

"I do not think that the girl herself has any coquetry in her; but she is young and joyous, and likes to chat with gentlemen, as she herself admits.

"I wish I could give her the very slightest hint of my wishes; but I know the objections you would make, as you have not seen her. On the other hand, I cannot keep her shut up until you return; and if once her heart should be touched, there is an end of all our pleasant hopes, although, of course, she would always meekly accept such an offer as neither she, nor even her mother could dream of.

"And now farewell, my dear John! I will only add that, if you were wise, you would trust to your mother's opinion, for a more lovely, gentle, amiable helpmate, you could not have. It would make me so happy to know, before I am laid in my grave, who would love my John; and I am so fond of the child, that I am quite astonished at myself.

"Once more, farewell! Write me an answer that will make me happy!

"Your loving mother,

REGINA SOPHIA THORMAN."

CHAPTER XV.

SIGHT-SEEING.

It is time that we should inquire concerning our heroine, after the great pleasures of which mention is made in her aunt's letter.

The investiture of the knights far outshone all the rest. This in some measure realized Blenda's splendid dreams; and it was no difficult matter for her lively imagination to convert the chapel of the palace into the lists of a tournament, and to fancy the newly created knights, fired with chivalrous ardour, springing upon their horses, to do battle with a knight stationed without the lists, who had sent in his glove, and caused a herald to proclaim that he was ready to do battle, on foot or on horseback, with lance or with sword, with whosoever should be disposed to measure himself with him in honourable combat, or should venture to dispute the assertion that the lady of his love was the fairest of the fair.

Unfortunately, the ceremony in the chapel was over before Blenda had brought her gorgeous dream to an end, so Aunt Regina Sophia pinched her arm for the second time, and that, as ill-luck would have it, at the very moment when the unknown knight,

who bore a black rose upon his shield, was about to raise his vizor in order to take breath after his victory. She had, however, decyphered the device upon his shield: "Once, and for ever;" and it was on this account that, as her aunt expressed it, she seemed to tread on air, for she bore in her heart a sense of overflowing happiness.

Of all that the delighted Chamberlain showed her on the way back—and it was a great deal—she saw nothing at all: she smiled so sweetly, however, that he was persuaded that she had listened to everything; and her frank acknowledgment at parting, that she had to thank him for the greatest pleasure that she had ever enjoyed in her life, made him ample amends for the annoyance he had experienced from Madame von Kühlen's interminable questions about everything which she did or did not see.

Under such circumstances it was natural that the Commercial Traveller's proposal should excite but little interest. Madame von Kühlen even went so far as to wonder how some people could be so conceited as to suppose that a girl who had only to cast her net, as it were, in order to draw it in full of distinguished admirers, would consent to wait two or three years, or perhaps even longer, for such a very moderate piece of good fortune.

She knew better, however, than to use such expressions in her sister's presence. To her she said: "That Blenda was too young, and had besides exhibited no preference for any one, and that it would, therefore, be better to wait," a sentiment which, as we know, was highly approved by Aunt Regina Sophia.

The good woman was far indeed from suspecting its real motive.

After these great events, the dinner at Patrick's, the refusal of the Commercial Traveller, and the visit to the palace, and investiture of the knights, everything fell back into its ordinary course, for Aunt Regina Sophia had her own designs, and so, as Blenda said laughingly to her mother, she was again "shut up in the tower," although not, it must be owned, in altogether such strict seclusion as at first.

In the course of the two following weeks she was twice taken to the Royal Park; but this, beautiful as it was, did not by any means equal the expectations she had formed of it; for there was no music, no crowds of visitors, no royal family dining with open windows. Her aunt had artfully selected two ordinary week-day mornings for their visits. But at any rate Blenda had been there, and could no longer exclaim, with a sigh, "Oh, if I could but see the Royal Park!"

Accordingly she did not sigh, but she pined like a bird in a cage.

* * * *

At length, however, the monotony of their every day life was interrupted by an invitation from Patrick to go with him and Henrietta to see Gauthier's horsemanship.

This too was an evening worth remembering.

The following night was passed by Blenda in visions of galloping Arabs, dancing Bedouins, and nymphs with gauze wings mounted on enchanted horses.

The scene excited her to that degree, that she clapped her hands and uttered exclamations of delight, until Henrietta declared that for her part she must go away if she were compelled longer to witness such absurd demonstrations.

"Oh, do not interfere with her, she is exquisite, better than all the rest put together," whispered the Chamberlain, who had received a hint that she was going that evening to Gauthier's from Henrietta, who was quite ignorant of the fact that Patrick had invited his aunt and cousin to accompany them.

"Oh! you think her exquisite?" replied Mr. Patrick in a mocking tone.

"Yes, in a certain sense."

"Indeed! I congratulate you on your taste, and am glad to have afforded you the opportunity for so much pleasure."

Henrietta's flashing eyes encountered a look that was meant to be reproachful; but she was angry, and taking the scornful line, paid to all appearance no further attention to the Chamberlain . . .

"How cross you look, my love," whispered the husband to his wife as they went out. "I am sure your shoes pinch."

(Be it known to the reader, that Henrietta had established the custom of complaining of the tightness of her shoes, whenever she was out of humour and had no reason to give for it.)

This time, however, she was not satisfied with merely laying the blame on the unoffending shoes, but replied to her still more unoffending husband—

"Yes, indeed, they do pinch, and I am indebted for this annoyance to the person who always does my commissions so stupidly."

"But, dear Henrietta, you gave the measure yourself."

"Oh, don't talk to me about measures."

"My dear Henrietta!"

"What a pleasure for me to exhibit myself in the interesting company with which you have burdened me! If it were not for them I could have had the droschky; but another time—another time—"

"Take care, dear Henrietta, some one might overhear us."

"Well, and what then?"

"What then?" and the good patient Patrick took the liberty of filling up the meaning by a gesture with his head.

"I should like to know who could overhear us? That sentimental insufferable Chamberlain—I will have nothing more to do with him—is playing the agreeable to that little fool with whom I will never appear in company again, I give you notice,—and her lady mother! Dear me! such a *lady* as that is! enough to make one die of laughing! . . ."

Here, however, Henrietta was interrupted by the said lady herself, who came in her

innocence to say how grateful she was, and how delighted with the great kindness of her dear Henrietta; and Blenda immediately chimed in with equal animation, at the same time seating herself with a kind of impatient determination beside Henrietta, and turning over the Chamberlain to her mother.

But do what she might, it was not in Blenda's power to regain the good graces which she had never possessed; and during the whole drive back not one single word did Henrietta utter.

CHAPTER XVI.

A DILEMMA.

THE day after this dissipation was one of great importance in the life of our heroine, and destined to produce the most important consequences.

She was just up, and was going to write a letter home to her old minister, which was to contain her first remittance to lame Britta, when Deborah came in with the coffee.

These little intervals of gossip were a real blessing both to Madame von Kühlen and to Deborah, for both had long since come to an understanding, a tacit one of course—that it was a very desirable thing to rescue at least a few moments from Mrs. Thorman's somewhat oppressive despotism.

"How is my sister to-day, Deborah? We came home so late yesterday, that we could not even wish her good-night."

"Thank you for your kind inquiries, she was in her most cheerful spirits last night."

"Well, thank God for it."

"Immediately after you were gone, the postman came—but did you enjoy yourselves at Gauthier's?"

"Yes, it was very pleasant and very amusing, that is the least one can say of it. . . . I maintain that any one who wishes to see a little of life ought to come to Stockholm. But what about the postman?"

"He brought a letter from Mr. John, and that always makes my mistress happy. But this time she seemed more so than usual; and I do not think I ever saw her in such spirits all the time that I have lived with her."

"Oh!" interposed Blenda, eagerly, "I dare say that cousin John has met with some great piece of good fortune abroad. I should not wonder if he were to bring my aunt home a rich daughter-in-law from Hamburg."

"That might easily be; Mr. John is really a handsome man, very different from Mr. Patrick. He plays on the pianoforte like an angel, and is a member of the Philharmonic Society; but, my dear young lady, I meant to ask you to go down quite early to-day, for my mistress said, as many as three or four times, yesterday evening, that she should like to know how you had enjoyed yourself."

"Oh, how glad I am to think that my good excellent aunt is so fond of me! Besides, I am quite as eager to tell, as she can be to hear about it."

Before an hour had elapsed, Blenda was down stairs with her aunt, who listened smilingly to her description of all she had seen.

"Oh! dear Aunt, I really do not know what I would not do,—I think I would willingly work fourteen hours a-day—to see again the Storming of Missolonghi. Oh! Aunt, if you could but have seen the riding, and galloping, and fighting, till the swords flashed fire, and how the killed and wounded lay piled in heaps together; and heard the roar of the cannon, and the clash of weapons. I laughed and cried in a breath, for I could not believe it was merely a play. Oh, what glorious horses!—what magnificent men they were!"

"Bless us, child, what an excited fancy yours is! I am afraid, you little goose, that I shall have to find some rational escort for you, for I should not think the Chamberlain was much to be depended upon."

"Do you know, Aunt"—and Blenda's countenance, lately so animated, became suddenly thoughtful—"I have quite a peculiar feeling as regards him."

"Heyday!—Why, you are not fascinated by him, are you?"

"Oh, no, dear Aunt, on the contrary, I am afraid I am ungrateful towards him."

"And why so?"

"Because I am indebted to him for the great pleasure of seeing the investiture of the knights . . . but still I can't help feeling as if some evil thing were at hand when he smiles and looks at me."

"He has not said or done anything to offend you, has he?"

"Oh, no! by no means; he has never said a word to me that was not very kind and civil."

"Oh! as to that, it is not in words only that people can offend; he might for instance—"

"What! dear Aunt?"

"Oh! I do not know exactly; he might try to take your hand; he might even venture to squeeze it."

"Ah, that's exactly it! if that is an offence, he has been guilty of it; for, yesterday evening when we were in the crowd, going out, he took my hand, to help me through as he said; and then he drew my arm through his, and squeezed it so, that I think I should have screamed, if I had not been afraid that Henrietta would scold me."

"Henrietta scold you?"

"Yes; she had been angry once already, because I could not restrain an exclamation; but that was for the warriors who were killed. . . ."

"Listen to me, my love! If you should meet this man again—but I will warn Patrick not to receive him any more—let your manner to him be very cold."

"That I will, dear Aunt, very willingly. Besides, he has never anything pleasant to

say; it is always the same story over and over again."

"And what is that?"

"He always talks to me of myself; and I think so much of my little self when I am alone, that I should like to think of something else when I am with other people."

"Poor child! you have been exposed to many risks already. Had it not been for me, all those steamboat gentlemen would have pounced like so many hawks upon my little dove."

"Do you think so, Aunt?"

"Yes; a young, pretty, unprotected girl, is sure to be looked upon as an easy prey; and it is therefore the most fortunate thing that can happen to her, if she can be safely provided for by a happy marriage."

"I think so too."

"Oh! you think so? Then I suppose you would not object to such a thing?"

"No, I should be very glad to marry, if an agreeable young man were to present himself whom I could like—"

"... And for whom you would not have to wait several years, like the Commercial Traveller. Long engagements are often worse than solitary liberty."

"I do not know about that, as I have never been engaged; ... but it would be very pleasant to be a young married woman, and to wear a cap, and have a pretty house handsomely furnished; and with pictures and flowers—no end of flowers—and a husband who makes a great deal of me. Oh! he must make an *immense* deal of me—he must scarcely let me set foot to the ground."

"Yes, that is all very well, if you deserve it, child; but you must not build castles in the air; you must look forward to a reasonable and tranquil, though a happy life, shared with some good and worthy man; and should you be so fortunate as to secure that, all your thoughts must be directed towards making him happy and comfortable."

"Oh, of course, we should both do our utmost to make our home a happy one."

"Moreover you must be very industrious and domestic, and above all very grateful, for you must consider that there are not many men, themselves well to do in the world, who would like to marry a portionless girl."

"Do not be afraid, Aunt, I shall certainly not forget that; but do you really believe—that—that such a man will present himself?"

"My child," replied Aunt Regina Sophia, in a tone of solemn prophecy, "he will."

"Really!"

"I might almost say that he has already done so; although you cannot see him in person."

At these words Blenda's cheeks were suffused with a crimson glow. Was it possible that her knight could have addressed himself to her aunt in writing?

"Have you any suspicion of any one, my little Blenda, that you look so confused?"

"Yes . . . no . . . I do not know."

"Well, would you like to know?"

Blenda well remembered having read a hundred times, that a modest maiden would not even appear to comprehend so difficult a question, much less would she say "yes" at once. But Blenda was too natural to profit by her studies, so she replied simply—

"Dear Aunt, I should like very much to know."

"Very well, then, the person whom I have destined to be your husband . . ."

"Whom you have destined to be my husband?"

"And who is more worthy of you than any one else" . . . Here the mother paused in order to give greater emphasis to the impending announcement.

"Is who?" stammered Blenda.

"Is my son John?"

"My . . . my . . . cousin John?" repeated Blenda, in a tone so tremulous and terrified that Aunt Regina Sophia thought it expedient to add with an encouraging glance—

"Compose yourself, my love. I know you must have been altogether unprepared for so unexpected a piece of good-fortune. But the fact is that you have won my heart, and so I have recommended you as a wife to my favourite son; and, my child, he is a man who if he liked could have as many wives for the asking as he has fingers, and rich heiresses too—for you may believe me when I tell you he is one of a thousand! Between ourselves, Henrietta was nearly out of her mind, because she could not get *him* instead of Patrick . . . But do come to yourself, child . . . what I have told you is the plain truth."

"But . . . but . . . Good Heavens . . . he has never even seen me yet! . . . and . . ."

"Mercy on us! You have a strange way of expressing your gratitude, and I cannot say that you look at all as I hoped you would when I informed you that I might come to be a real mother to you. But I suppose that is from bashfulness, and perhaps from some lurking doubt of the truth of all this."

Blenda wished to answer, to dispel her aunt's illusion, but she could not.

"You must know I have written to John, and commended you to him most tenderly. I told him—yes, upon my word I did—that it would make me very happy indeed to see him married to you before I die . . . and look here. This is his answer."

Aunt Regina Sophia unfolded her son's letter, and read the following extract:—

"With regard to your anxious wish, dear mother, to provide me with a wife, this time I might perhaps be inclined not to refuse, for the description you have given me of my young cousin is fascinating enough to make the idea very agreeable to me. That which pleases me best, is the circumstance that she is without fortune or pretensions, amiable, and guileless; it has always been my determination to marry for no other wealth than that which I should find in the heart of my bride."

"But above all things I charge you"—here Aunt Regina Sophia broke off—there was no occasion to read the following lines "but above all things I charge you not to say a word on the subject until my return; or if you cannot abstain from giving a hint, let it at least appear merely as your *own* wish, for who knows what the future may bring forth?"

But fear lest the little daughter-in-law so eagerly desired might slip through her own and her John's fingers, wrought the good woman up to such a pitch of impatience to get this marriage settled, that she could not possibly make up her mind to yield to her son's wishes in the matter of delay; and thus it was on the rock of this very impatience that her favourite project was doomed to split; for great as was her self-love in this particular, convinced as she strove to be of her niece's grateful joy, Blenda's downcast eyes, and melancholy countenance, could not fail to dispel the illusion of her kind aunt.

"Why do you not answer, my child? Take courage, and speak frankly."

"May I really do so?"

"Of course."

"Are you quite sure, that you" . . . and she paused.

"You little goose! Of course you understand that what I have said is merely to broach the subject. John has not commissioned me to propose for him. He will do that himself, if he likes and approves of you. And then all will depend upon the impression he makes upon you, when you have seen him."

"Oh! I know what that will be beforehand."

"Indeed!" said her aunt, colouring a little. "But I maintain that you do not; and that you will be so captivated with him, that you will be ready to give your little finger to have him for your husband."

"Oh no, Aunt, I am quite sure that will not be the case," Blenda now ventured to exclaim, while a tinge of displeasure coloured her cheeks also.

"Be upon your guard against yourself, child! It is difficult to judge of your feelings, since, in spite of the inclination to marry, which you just now announced, you set yourself against a proposal which offers you such inestimable advantages; for John, if he is not exactly rich, is at any rate very well to do in the world, and will be still more so whenever I die. And I myself was so kindly disposed towards you, that I could not resist mentioning this subject to you, in order to afford you a safeguard against outward temptations and against your own vanity."

"I am very grateful, my dear Aunt; very, very grateful, indeed," sobbed Blenda, quite overcome by these affectionate words, and deeply distressed at being obliged to grieve her aunt; "but . . ."

"But what?"

"Oh dear! oh dear!"

"Is there anything to prevent the fulfilment of my wish?"

"I don't know."

"Oh! you don't know; what does that mean?"

"At least I only know one thing."

"And that is?"

"That . . . I will not marry cousin John."

"There, go away, you foolish girl. Neither shall you marry him. But remember, you have only yourself to thank, if from this time forward there is a cold hand interposed between my heart and yours. Good-bye."

"Oh no, dear Aunt, not thus. For Heaven's sake do not be angry with me. I am so unhappy. Oh dear, what *shall* I do?"

"Go—leave me. I wish for no honeyed words, after you have shown yourself such as you have. Send Deborah to me."

Blenda did not venture to linger any longer. But as she left the room she felt as if the cold hand was already laid upon her heart.

CHAPTER XVII.

AN UNEXPECTED STROKE.

SEVERAL hours had elapsed, and, like two frightened birds in momentary dread of a shot from the sportsman's gun, Madame von Kühlen and her daughter sate together, their dismay increasing with every moment that brought them nearer to the hour of dinner, when they must encounter their incensed hostess.

"I declare, child," said the mother, in a low voice, "I cannot understand how you could ever venture to say no. *No* to my sister! Thank Heaven, however, that you had courage to do so, for it would have been a sad end of our journey hither, and of our hopes, if after all you had become the bride of a—hat-dresser!"

"Whatever cousin John might have been, I have heard said no, all the same—for—"

"Quite right, my child, for he would still have been cousin John."

Blenda only sighed.

"No, I cannot consent to anything below a count, or, at the very least, a baron, for my son-in-law,—otherwise the Chamberlain is a very pleasing young man."

"Oh! do not speak of him, Mamma. He ought to be ashamed of himself! he has very little consideration for me."

"Very little consideration? I am sure you must be mistaken there, child."

"At all events I do not advise him to take my hand again! I have learnt a great deal from Aunt Regina Sophia, and Heaven forgive me for having rewarded her kindness with such ingratitude! . . . but what o'clock is it now?"

"Nearly half-past twelve; we have only an hour yet. I really think I can hardly venture down stairs,—suppose she were to attack me."

"She will not do that; my aunt is too proud to wish to gain a daughter-in-law by influence or persuasion."

"Well, I only trust it may prove so."

"She had hoped that, on the contrary—and that no one could wonder at—we should have been very grateful to her. But what is all that noise on the stairs?—who can be running up so fast? Good Heavens! I hope nothing is the matter!"

But something was the matter; and it was something very serious.

Aunt Regina Sophia had been seized with a fresh and more violent attack of illness, and one from which this time there was no recovery. And on the evening of the same day on which Blenda had held with her aunt the decisive conversation above recorded, that stern but right-minded and honourable woman has no more.

She had no time to attend to any worldly concerns: death had, as it were, taken her by surprise; but it was evident that from the moment she became aware of its approach she made no resistance, but awaited her last moment with the tranquillity and firmness that might have been expected from one of her known strength of character and high religious principles.

Her last words conveyed a tender and affectionate greeting to her beloved son John. A few minutes previously she had lovingly whispered to Blenda, who knelt sobbing beside her bed—"May God help you, my poor child; I can do so no more."

And very soon did the two poor forsaken women feel that their kind protectress was indeed taken from them.

A few days after the funeral, and before Madame von Kühlen and Blenda had recovered from the stunning effects of so sudden and severe a blow, they received a visit from Henrietta, who ever since the day of her mother-in-law's death, had assumed entire control in the house.

She came (as she said, with a great show of sympathy), to inquire what steps her relations meant to take.

"What steps? Good heavens! we have not thought about taking any steps as yet," cried Madame von Kühlen, with ill-concealed alarm. "We two poor lone women had depended entirely upon Regina Sophia—God bless and reward her for her kindness to us!"

"Very true; but as she is gone, it will be necessary for you to come to some determination."

"Perhaps," stammered Blenda, "you mean that you wish us to remove immediately!"

"Oh! dear no, on no account—there is a month yet before the year is up—and you are most welcome to retain your room until that time. Then, however, the house will be let—or perhaps sold; but that depends upon what determination the brothers may come to, when John returns home."

"A month!" said Madame von Kühlen, with a gleam of returning hope; "oh, in

that time, I daresay, we shall hit upon some good plan, although I confess that at this moment I do not see any."

"If you would not take it amiss, I would gladly give you the best advice I could—and it is that which my husband also approves."

"Oh, pray let me hear it. I would follow it without hesitation, if it be good."

"At least," resumed Henrietta, with some emphasis, "it is the wisest plan, perhaps—the only one that can be put in execution."

Our two poor friends looked enquiringly and wonderingly at the relation who undertook to settle their fate with so much self-complacency.

"In my opinion you ought—"

"Well?"

"To return to your own home!"

Madame von Kühlen and her daughter were so completely taken by surprise by this answer, that for a moment neither of them could reply; and Henrietta went on, encouraged by their silence,—*"Where people are well known, and have lived many years, it is of course easier for them to make their way than in a great city, in which they are strangers. I must add, also, that we would defray all the cost of the journey, and would add a few trifles also from that which my late mother-in-law has left."*

By this time, however, Madame von Kühlen had quite recovered her presence of mind. "If this really is your advice," said she, "I am much obliged to you for it, as well as for your offer of paying our travelling expenses; but I can accept neither the one nor the other."

"You surprise me!"

"Heaven forbid that we should return in poverty and shame to a place where we have nowhere now to lay our head."

"Very well, if you think you have better prospects here, of which I know nothing—of course you had better stay and take advantage of them."

"No doubt the Lord will open some path before us."

"That may be; but I may as well tell you honestly, that you cannot reasonably expect any sacrifice from us, who, not to mention the poor-rates, have already so many distressed relations on our hands. It is very painful to me to have to mention this, but it is my duty not to leave you under a false impression, which might prove injurious to you."

"Under no circumstances should we have entertained any such expectation," replied Blenda, her cheeks crimsoning with suppressed indignation, "for we are perfectly aware that we have nothing now to rely upon but Providence, since our beloved protectress has been taken from us."

"And you have the more need of this reliance, since you may possibly not be so fortunate as again to have the opportunity of refusing one or more offers of marriage," said Henrietta, pointedly.

Blenda's eyes flashed; but she scorned

to reply—and, indeed, what could she have said!

"The Commercial Traveller," resumed Henrietta, "concerning whom my mother-in-law instituted further enquiries, is a very well-conducted and respectable man; but he is now on his travels—so there is no hope in that quarter, in case second thoughts should prove best; and I am afraid it would be still less worth while to cling to the hope that such a man as John should renew the suit, which his mother brought forward *without his knowledge*, and which met with so decided a refusal. . . . Yes, you may look surprised and indignant, but nothing has passed in this house with which I am not acquainted."

"I leave it to you to judge," now interposed Madame von Kühlen, with all the dignity which she thought her respected grandmother, who had seen the world, would have assumed on such an occasion, "I leave it to you to judge, whether it be consistent with delicacy, or even with good breeding, to adopt such a tone towards my daughter and myself in our distress; but of this I can assure you, that we neither regret the past, nor have any intention of seeking to alter it. He 'who is a Father to the fatherless, and defendeth the cause of the widow,' will not fail to provide for us."

"Oh!" exclaimed Henrietta, "so this is the way that my good intentions are met. In that case, I will certainly not trouble you in future, either with my company or my counsels. One, however, I must give at parting, although perhaps I am hardly justified in doing so, which is, that Madame von Kühlen should take care how she encourages the Chamberlain . . . small experience is needed to comprehend the meaning of his attentions . . . and I assure you, that he has often been ready to die of laughing at our little simpleton."

"Hush, my dear," said Madame von Kühlen, perceiving that Blenda, whose patience was exhausted, was about to speak. "Hush. It does not become a well-conducted girl to take any notice of such insinuations. But I, as her mother, may and will say, that poor as we are, a good name is as precious to us as to any one, and that I will not listen to any expressions derogatory to it."

Henrietta rose proudly, and with a cold mocking smile: "It is easy to perceive," said she, carelessly, "that my mother-in-law is no longer with us. I should think such a tone could never have been assumed in her time."

"That is my opinion also!" added Madame von Kühlen, still under the influence of anger and excitement; by the time that Henrietta had reached the door, however, the poor woman's courage fell—with her would vanish the last hope of assistance in their difficulties, for Henrietta ruled Patrick, and Patrick was the only person to whom they could now have recourse.

"Dear Henrietta, pray do not leave us in anger!"—and Madame von Kühlen laid her hand on the lace-trimming of her mantle to detain her.

"I came here with the best intentions," replied Henrietta. "But the return I have met with is such, that nothing should induce me to reiterate my well-meant advice."

"I must entreat you to forgive me, if I have said anything uncourteous; but the sorrow, the bitter sorrow, that has fallen upon us"—and here Madame von Kühlen began to weep—"has quite stunned us.—We are poor, I know, and have no right to set ourselves up in opposition to those who are inclined to befriend us."

"Come, that is what I call speaking reasonably! and if you should be inclined for the journey—and I am convinced that a pleasant country town would be a much more desirable residence for you than Stockholm—I am still ready to pay your expenses, and to renew my promise of assistance in various trifling ways."

But to leave Stockholm—the object of all the good woman's aspirations for so many years past—and where she was ready to lay her life, that some foreign duke, count or lord, would before long see and fall in love with Blenda, and make her a great lady—was a downright impossibility. At home they had often lived upon herrings and potatoes, and oatmeal porridge—and even if they were now a little spoilt for such things, would it not be much better to return to their old habits, or even, if necessary, to a still more frugal diet, than to give up all the brilliant hopes which she had cherished for seventeen long years.

"Indeed, I cannot, my dear Henrietta—upon my honour I cannot—can I, Blenda? What say you?"

"I submit entirely to your judgment, dear Mamma!" replied Blenda, evasively; but it was easy to perceive, both from her look and manner, that she would rather live upon air and water than leave Stockholm. For where, if not *here*, could she hope to meet with him whom she never abandoned the hope of seeing again?

"But what is there so attractive in the prospect of staying here in hunger and want?"

"In hunger and want!—why must that be?"

"Yes, for even if we should be willing to continue depriving those whom we have heretofore employed of a portion of our work—that could never suffice for everything."

"Let us at least retain the work, dear Henrietta, until we find some more customers? We will advertise for employment, and then we can hire a small furnished room."

Having heard this final decision, there was nothing further for Henrietta to say—so she retired with the air of an offended sovereign, who has in vain condescended to parley with her refractory subjects.

* * * * *

Happily for the unfortunate ladies, they had that very day another visitor, namely Patrick, who told them that, if they liked it, they were kindly welcome to remain in

their present apartment throughout the winter.

When they replied, however, that they scrupled to take advantage of this kind proposal, not on Patrick's account, but on that of John, (for how could they accept favours from him, after having mortified him by a refusal?) he made no further opposition to their proposed removal, which, however, he greatly facilitated by telling them that they must keep all the furniture of the room they now occupied, since he was convinced that it had been the intention of his lamented mother to make a present of it to his Aunt Emerentia. Respecting the work from his warehouse, however, it certainly would be a very good thing if they could get sufficient employment elsewhere, because—because—

Both mother and daughter understood him perfectly, without further explanation, and perceiving the embarrassment of Patrick between the dictates of his wife and those of his own kind heart, they hastened to assure him that they were in hopes of finding plenty of employment, as they could undertake many different kinds of needlework.

"And remember, if you should want anything," said he, as he went away, "you must not fail to give me a hint of it privately."

"Kind, generous creature!" sighed Madame von Kühlen.

CHAPTER XVIII.

RENEWAL OF AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

FROM this time forward, the ladies took to studying the newspapers, and spending a couple of hours every morning in answering advertisements; for, as Mrs. Thorman's household was not broken up until the month spoken of by Henrietta had expired, they were able to allow themselves this interval of repose from their work.

But although it was one of the sayings of the respected grandmother, who had seen the world, that those "who seek will find," yet in this instance the truth of the proverb appeared somewhat problematic.

In the first place, as regarded the room to be hired, one was too dear, another too small, a third smoked, and a fourth, of which the rent was tolerably reasonable, had the drawback of being situated at the top of five very steep flights of stairs.

"We could get it for sixty rix-dollars a-year," observed Blenda, "whereas, all those that are pleasantly situated, and have a kitchen, are not to be had under ninety or a hundred."

"That is very true, my dear," replied her mother, thoughtfully; "but, on the other hand—" she hesitated, for it was evidently rather difficult to go on with the speech.

"On the other hand, what!"

"This, my child: that unless we are blessed with some singular good fortune, we should not even be able to earn these sixty dollars, as well as all that is required for food, lighting, and the rest, and therefore—"

"What?"

"I think that we may just as well get into difficulties for a hundred dollars as for sixty; and meanwhile we shall at least live like gentlewomen."

"But good Heavens! if we are not able to pay—only think of that, dear Mamma—they might send us to prison; . . . and how dreadful that would be!"

"Not at all! it would be so much the better, you would see?"

"What can you mean?"

"Oh, we should find some benevolent person who would write a long and pathetic account in the newspapers, of two unprotected ladies of quality, who had got into difficulties, without the slightest fault of their own; and besides, there would probably be a few words in addition about the firmness of character exhibited by the one, and the unparalleled beauty of the other . . . and then you would see that our room would be only too small for the crowds of visitors who would be attracted to us out of curiosity."

"But how humiliating that would be!"

"Not a bit of it! and upon my word, that would not be at all a bad opportunity of being seen by all sorts of people!"

"But at any rate, dear mother, it would be mean and unworthy; and we should have no right to act thus, as we should have knowingly involved ourselves in needless expenses."

"Nonsense!"

"Do indulge me this once, and let us take the little room for sixty rix-dollars."

"No, certainly not, my dear."

"Pray do, dear mother!"

"Let us make a compromise. You know, my little girl, no human being would climb up all those stairs. . . . We must have a nice, comfortable home . . . and now listen: we have got five-and-twenty rix-dollars laid by: that ensures our being able to pay the first quarter; and when we have three months—that is, ninety-two days, child—before us, we must be stupid indeed if we cannot find some way out of our difficulties."

"But suppose we were not so fortunate!"

"Well, nothing worse would happen than that I should have to pledge the ear-rings and the summer mantle that I inherited from poor dear Regina Sophia; I should not want them in the winter, you know. Really the *Mont de Piété* is a very beneficial institution: the property one deposits there runs no risk of being stolen."

Blenda smiled, and made no further objection.

A nice little room in Knight-street, up three pair of stairs, and with a kitchen, and a pretty view over the sea, was finally engaged by our two ladies. As they had resolved to set up for themselves on a respectable footing, of

course it was necessary to choose a street with a creditable name; and what could sound better than Knight-street? Blenda was perfectly delighted that such a street should exist.

The great object now was to obtain work, and that was still more difficult.

The dress-makers and milliners were overwhelmed with applications; and the only work with which they could have supplied her, namely bonnet-making, Blenda could not undertake. The linendrapers' shops had their regular workwomen. So nothing remained for them but to advertise "All kinds of needlework done, &c.:" and thereupon came a few people who wanted dresses made "well and in the fashion, at a reasonable price." But neither were our two gentlewomen competent to undertake this. What they wanted was plain work or embroidery; but to this they received for answer that the former was done for half-price at the house of correction, and that as for embroidery, that was bought ready made up in the shops.

"Well, well," said Madame von Kühlen, a few days before their removal from the quiet dwelling, in which they had now spent nearly three months—"Well, well, we must not lose courage at the first rebuff."

"The first?" rejoined Blenda. "If we have met with one, we have met with twenty."

"Well, suppose we have, my child; on the other hand, we have at least, twenty resources left."

"But it is so disagreeable to be perpetually wandering about the streets in this way."

"You must have patience, my child."

"It is not so easy to have patience. Go where I will, I meet that odious Chamberlain at every turn; and he is always so excessively civil, that I have not the face to tell him how tiresome he is."

"But, my dear, you will be obliged to do so nevertheless, for he is no fitting acquaintance for us; and as you remember, our lamented Regina Sophia could not endure anything that could be considered in the slightest degree questionable."

"My good, kind aunt! She would never have forsaken us, if she had lived."

"Oh! do not cry, my child! To-morrow we will go and visit poor Regina Sophia's grave: we will not leave this house without taking leave of her who received and sheltered us in it, and blessing her for it . . . But listen, child. Suppose I were to take to baking butter cracknels, at which I am such a capital hand; for those we get here are good for nothing."

"Dear Mamma! How can you think of butter cracknels, when we were just talking of poor Aunt Regina Sophia, and purposing to visit her grave?"

"But, my dear, the one does not interfere with the other. In spite of our sorrow we must think of our worldly concerns; and I think that was a very good notion of mine, especially as the necessary outlay would be very small."

"But what am I to do, if I should be so unfortunate as not to be able to obtain any sewing?"

"Oh! I have another resource ready if that should happen."

"What is it?"

"Why, I think that with your talent for drawing—and you know your father taught it you thoroughly—you might advertise for little children to come to you as pupils."

"Do you really think so?"

"I do, indeed. By that means you would get acquainted with the parents, and to make acquaintances is the main point—upon that you may depend."

"But"

"Nonsense with your buts. Such drawings as yours, with beautiful lakes and trees, and little dogs, are surely good enough for children to copy; so that is a settled thing."

Blenda would have made one or two more objections; but it was quite impossible to shake either Madame von Kühlen's convictions or her courage, which latter was moreover effectually supported by the certainty that, with the assistance of the ham, the butter, and the cheese, all of which were still untouched, they could bid defiance to a long course of evil fortune.

Blenda's courage was by no means to be compared with that of her mother. But the example before her at any rate produced a good effect.

* * * * *

The next evening two ladies, dressed in deep mourning and holding handkerchiefs to their eyes, which were dim with tears, were seen proceeding along the road leading from the new cemetery. They were Madame von Kühlen and her daughter.

They had just taken their last leave of Mrs. Regina Sophia Thorman with heavy hearts, and with a painful consciousness of the desolate condition in which her death had left them; and Blenda's feelings were rendered the more painful by the recollection of the disappointment she had caused her good aunt so shortly before her death.

As yet the mother and daughter had not spoken to one another; for what indeed could they have said, except that which had been already so often repeated:—"To-morrow we must leave our haven of refuge: it seems as if we were going out for the first time into the wide world!"

They were aroused from their abstraction by a hasty step behind them, a keen glance of enquiry, and at length an exclamation of "Ha! good evening, ladies; . . . this is indeed a very agreeable surprise!"

They both looked up, and saw before them their travelling companion, Mr. Born, the Royal Secretary.

"We have just been to visit the grave of my sister, our only friend and protectress," was Madame von Kühlen's reply, uttered in a tone of such sober sadness, that the smile instantly vanished from the young man's countenance, as gazing with sympathy on the gentle melancholy expressed in Blenda's countenance, he said, in a tone of feeling:—

"That must indeed be a heavy trial, and I am truly concerned to hear of it. But do I

not remember another relation coming to fetch you on board the steamer?"

"Yes; that was my nephew, the linen-draper, a very estimable young man; but then, you see, he has so many people dependent upon him for work and assistance; and, besides, we do not wish to be a burden to him, if we can possibly avoid it!"

"May I ask whether you still live in Pilot-street, or if you have changed your abode?"

Madame von Kühlen looked enquiringly at her daughter. The secretary's manner was unexceptionably courteous and respectful, and it could not be otherwise than a pleasure and comfort in their sorrow to converse for a few moments with any one who showed such kind sympathy; but the warnings of Aunt Regina Sophia still rang in her sister's ears, and when Blenda expressed her opinion by a slight shake of the head, Madame von Kühlen replied with some embarrassment—

"We shall consider it a favour if you will not ask us..."

"What do you mean?"

"I do not doubt the kindness of your intentions—no, not for a moment! but two friendless and lonely women such as we are, must not show themselves so easy of access as we appeared on board the steamer; and I must tell you it gave us much pain to find that this readiness on our part could be misinterpreted."

"In the name of goodness what do you mean? It really seems as if I had got into very bad repute."

"Oh, no, not that—but the note—"

"My dear Madame von Kühlen, it would grieve me more than I can say, if you could ascribe my wish to renew my acquaintance with you and your daughter to any unworthy motive. But if, in my note, I may have expressed too strongly the interest I felt in the acceptance of the invitation I ventured to send, at any rate there could have been no impropriety in it, since my mother and sisters, who were at that time in town, were to have been of the party."

"But no mention was made of that circumstance in the note," interposed Blenda.

"I confess that I was wrong in omitting it; but it would be hard if, to the punishment inflicted upon me by Mrs. Thorman's reply, were to be added a mistrust of me, which is most mortifying to my feelings."

"But if we cannot receive you as a visitor, what is the use of telling you where we live!" urged Madame von Kühlen; "in that case the others would of course soon know it also."

"None of those whom you allude to are at this moment in Stockholm. The Lieutenant—who was really inconsolable at not being permitted to see you both again—was only a short time on leave. The Baron, who would have moved heaven and earth to do so, was summoned home immediately afterwards on account of some important family affairs. And Mr. A—, the Commercial Traveller, is now, as I have heard, in France; therefore, I am the only one remaining of our little steamboat party of friends to answer for the sins of all."

"I think," Blenda now ventured to say, "that my good aunt would not have approved of our prolonging this conversation, and I am sure Mr. Born, you will understand our anxiety not to neglect the good counsels, which, unhappily, we can no longer receive."

"I cannot misunderstand so positive a command. But with all possible respect for your aunt's strict principles, you must permit me to assure you that, if you really are so unfortunately situated as to have no one here to help and protect you, it would be carrying your scruples a little too far to reject the offers of friendship which I make with the best intentions. I do not ask now to escort you to pleasure parties or to places of amusement—for my mother and sister are gone back to the country—but what I do ask is, to be permitted, during the month which I have still at my own disposal—for after that I must leave Stockholm for Ting—to serve you to the best of my ability, both by my advice and exertions, for I solemnly protest that I know no better way of making amends for my former obtrusive presumption."

"But in what way could you serve us!" Madame von Kühlen took courage to ask.

"In whatever way you will do me the honour of employing me—at least I hope so. Have you secured lodgings? Have you laid in a stock of wood? for you know winter is at hand. But, remember, if you accept my offers of service, I shall claim to be looked upon as a real friend—and those who know me well could tell you that, in spite of all my thoughtlessness, there is some good in me, and that I am not undeserving of confidence."

"I am persuaded of that, Blenda, my child! And I do not see why, in our desolate condition, we should not speak freely to the Secretary, since he is so kind."

"Indeed, you may, as you would to a son or to a brother. Upon my honour, I am so much in earnest that I should be quite happy if the young lady would call me Uncle... So, now to begin with the lodging—"

"A lodging we have already secured, and a very cheerful and pleasant one, at No. — in Knight street."

"And, wood?"

"Patrick—my nephew, God bless him!—has already supplied us with wood, and it is, thanks to him, also, that we are able to fit up our room with some very nice furniture left by my poor sister."

"Come, thank heaven! the prospect begins to brighten," cried the Secretary, with a cordial sympathy that extinguished the last spark of mistrust in the hearts of both mother and daughter.

"But," interposed Blenda, with a slight sigh, "that which is most of all needful is still wanting."

"And what is that?"

"Work."

"Well, at last here is a field for my exertions."

"Indeed! You do not mean to say that you can suggest anything; that would be fortunate!"

"I am acquainted with one or two old ladies, very benevolent and active people, and I will enlist them in your service. Will you admit me when I come with the answer?"

"Oh, of course, if you come on business of such importance, we cannot do otherwise." And now that Madame von Kühlen's tongue was unloosed, she proceeded to give the Secretary so detailed an account of all that had passed since they came to Stockholm, that even an eye-witness could not have been better informed; and it may be imagined that it was with no small degree of pride and exultation that she imparted to her new confidant, in an under tone, the glorious fact—that during that time her daughter had received two excellent offers of marriage.

Blenda, who had fallen a little behind, did not hear this; and the Secretary replied, also in an under tone, as he drew nearer to Madame von Kühlen, "If I might take the liberty, I would ask why the young lady did not consider either of these excellent offers deserving of her consideration?"

"Oh! my dear Sir, for that she had her reasons, which no doubt time will show. Suffice it to say that we should have been freed from all the difficulty and distress in which we are now plunged, if we had accepted what was tendered to us. But Time brings counsel, as my excellent grandmother, who had seen the world, used to say; and my daughter is young, and would rather put up with any hardship than part with her liberty so soon."

"Well then, she is exactly of my mind . . . for to repay your confidence in kind, I must tell you that, at this very moment, my family are conspiring against my liberty, which they wish me to sacrifice at the shrine of the young and wealthy daughter of a clergyman. I am going to retire into the country at present, as a preliminary step; but I think it very possible that, when I am once secure of an appointment which has been promised to me, I may return to lay both that and myself at the feet of the lady in question."

After this statement, which was obviously made in order to remove any remaining scruple of the ladies, Blenda again drew near; and the best understanding had been established between them, when they re-entered the town, where the Secretary took leave of them, after renewing his promise faithfully to act the part of an uncle to Blenda.

* * * *

On the following day, the mother and daughter repaired to their new lodging; and what were Madame von Kühlen's feelings when Patrick came forward to meet them, saying:

"The first quarter's rent is paid, my dear aunt . . . I'll be hanged if I don't wish I could do a great deal more for you; but it is not always easy to do everything one wishes."

The Secretary made his appearance a little later, and he, too, was a messenger of good tidings.

"There now, my child!" said the mother, in a tone of exultation, "you see how Heaven smooths the way before us! For Patrick is quite a Providence to us, and the Secretary deserves to be called our guardian angel."

"Oh, yes; my doubts and fears were very wrong!"

CHAPTER XIX.

FUTURE EXPERIENCE OF LIFE.

Two months had elapsed.

On a cold and rainy evening late in November, we find our heroine in her new home, seated beside a scanty fire, and gazing, with a mingled expression of joy and affectionate anxiety, at the pale and sunken cheeks of her mother, on which, after a low fever of several weeks' duration, a tinge of colour, which looked like returning health, was beginning to appear.

Madame von Kühlen was lying back in an arm-chair, but, weak as she was, she did not rest from her work, and was knitting as fast as she was able at a child's sock.

"Oh, Mamma, how can we thank God sufficiently for sending us a gleam of sunshine, after all this long, sad time? for when once you are well again, all will be right."

"Thank you, my poor dear child!—but you have suffered more than I."

"I almost think I have, from sorrow at being able to do so very little."

"And neither Patrick nor Henrietta have been here all this weary while. At first he at least used to come now and then . . . Well, well, men have a great many things to attend to;—and, besides, as he has heard nothing of us, no doubt he supposes that we are doing well."

"Very likely."

"If you had called upon him he would have come immediately: of that I am convinced."

"I really could not make up my mind to go to him . . . and besides, I was afraid of meeting my cousin John;—he must be come back by this time, I should think."

"Oh!" sighed Madame von Kühlen, "if, after all, we should not have acted so very wisely,—if we should never see anything more of this Scanian Count!"

Sickness had brought our friend in some degree to her senses. Blenda made no reply; she turned away quickly, that her mother might not see the tears wrung from her by hope so long deferred.

"And the prospect of going to see that beautiful China, dear Blenda . . . well, that we may accomplish yet; but we earn very little."

"And yet at first, when the kind Secretary was here to help us, we got on so well."

"But now unfortunately he is no longer at hand; and although the ladies promised to continue their patronage of us, I am afraid this long illness has worn out their patience, for we were very long in finishing the last counterpane."

"And yesterday, when I went to Mrs.

C—'s, she told me something very unpleasant."

"What was that, my child?"

"That she was obliged to divide the work which she and her acquaintances had to give, because there were so many poor people whom they could not altogether refuse to assist."

"She is quite right there; and although it is a loss to us, it is a gain to others, who are perhaps more unfortunate . . . but let us see: you know we can still have recourse to my brilliant idea—"

"Which, Mamma?"

"Oh, don't you remember?—the butter cracknels. As soon as I get well I will set about making them; and I feel convinced that they will answer."

"But it will be so long, dear Mamma, before you can go into the kitchen again; and meanwhile—"

"I know what you mean, my dear; but my respected grandmother, who had seen the world, used to say, that after seven calamities—"

"Oh, I know, Mamma, I know!"

"Then, if you know, you must be persuaded that the sun will soon shine upon us again . . . Let us see how much money we still have in all."

"In all," replied Blenda, with a smile which her troubles had been as yet unable to dim, "we are in possession of three dollars in notes, and twelve shillings (Swedish) in copper."

"Well, dear Blenda, it might be worse, especially as we have some of our provisions still left. There is still more than half of the ham."

"But our last cheese is gone; for I had no money to give the nurse last week; and besides, such food is not fit for you; the doctor recommends broth, and our port wine is come to an end."

"Never mind, my darling. With the money that is left, I will buy one more bottle, and a few pounds of meat for some strong broth; and if that does not set me up again, I will leave such expensive luxuries to the cat. Perhaps the best thing for me would be to return to my old diet."

"But even for that *something* is required; and we must find means to get that something by hook or by crook. I think . . ."

"What?"

"I think the only possible way would be to advertise that I would go out to work by the day."

But this proposal was not at all agreeable to Madame von Kühlen's pride; and it was only by a great effort that she could be brought to reconcile herself to it. She did so, however, at last; but only upon the condition that Blenda, who had quite given up the drawing project, should advertise, at the same time, that a young lady wished to give lessons in music to little children.

"Yes, dear mother," replied Blenda; "upon that I really think that I might venture. I know my notes perfectly, and can play well

enough, at any rate, to help those who cannot play at all."

"There, now, you see how useful a little mature consideration may be. To-morrow you shall send the advertisements to the newspaper."

Accordingly, a few days later, both these advertisements appeared in the paper.

"We shall have at least twenty answers to each," said Madame von Kühlen; and, in spite of these magnificent prognostications, her sanguine spirit was not altogether discouraged when the forty answers dwindled down to two—that is, one a-piece.

The reply to the advertisement concerning work, stated that the young lady who was willing to work by the day might apply personally at a specified house in Long East-street; while the reply to that of "music taught on reasonable terms" was dated from No.—, in Glass-Bridge-street. The former being in the city of Stockholm, the other in the southern suburb.

"Oh dear, how can I ever find my way so far!" cried Blenda.

"The worst of it is," said her mother, a little disconcerted, "that you will probably wear your shoes out before you get paid. If it were but summer, you could go across in one of the row-boats for half a shilling banco."

"But as I should have to be rowed across twice, that would be a shilling each time I went, and the same for coming back: so that would be two shillings a-day. But I will be very careful, so that my boots may last out the winter; and I dare say the charwoman will be so kind as to go with me."

The next morning, having dressed herself with great care—which was essential, as she was anxious to make a favourable impression,—Blenda, accompanied by her mother's best wishes, set out to seek her fortune.

In Long East-street she was received by two crabbed and stingy old maids, who wanted to find somebody who would sit and sew for them the whole day for eight shillings (Swedish).

"Really it is impossible; I should not earn enough," replied Blenda, courteously but firmly.

"How! not enough, little Miss, when you get your board into the bargain?"

"It would not answer to me."

"Let me tell you, however, that there are hundreds of poor girls who would look upon such terms as extremely liberal; and, if we liked to be close, we might get plenty for six shillings, or four, or even for their food only, and be thanked into the bargain. And, God be praised, we have the blessings of the poor, for they know what we are!"

"I really cannot engage myself for less than sixteen shillings a-day. I am a very diligent worker, and my mother, who is but just recovering from an illness, requires all that I can earn."

"Oh, we know all that sort of thing, little

Miss; that is a very old story. . . . But what is your mother's name?"

"Von Kühlen."

What, a lady of rank? Oh, then young lady you may offer your services where you please; we have no wish to have a noble need-lawoman. A young lady of quality—Heaven help us!—from the provinces, no doubt. They all will come to Stockholm, whether or no. I believe they think the streets are paved with gold; but they find the truth rather different, I suspect."

Blenda's heart was swelling with indignation; she felt the tears rising in her eyes; but happily she had sufficient self-command to restrain them. She hastily turned away from the old ladies, who rejoiced in the blessings of the poor, and sought the house to which she had been directed in her capacity of teacher of music.

When she ascended to the first-floor of the handsome dwelling, and saw the decorated bell-handle, the letter-box, and the glittering lock, she breathed an earnest aspiration that she whose dwelling exhibited such a glittering exterior, might be of a more amiable disposition than the two old maids, the entrance and staircase of whose abode were as forbidding as themselves.

After she had waited long enough for the beating of her heart to have subsided, the door was opened by a maid, who before our heroine had time to speak, enquired in a confident tone,—

"Are you the young person who received my lady's letter?"

Blenda replied in the affirmative.

"Then be so good as to walk into the drawing-room; my mistress will come directly."

Blenda sat down and waited.

She began to examine the pictures, an occupation which did not, however, prevent her from hearing the sound of two voices, apparently in animated conversation in the adjoining room. At length the door opened, and a lady entered, who appeared as prepossessing as she was young and pretty.

"Oh, so you are the young lady who wishes to give lessons?" said the lady, looking at her encouragingly. . . . "Who was your master?"

"I have had no master at Stockholm. The little that I know, which would, however, I think, be sufficient for beginners, was taught me partly by my mother, and partly by the organist of our parish; but he had learned music very thoroughly from the band-master of the regiment of West Gothland!"

These artless details of the musical acquirements of the young teacher, which were not likely to prove a great recommendation, did not, however, appear to produce any unsatisfactory impression upon the lady, who replied kindly,—

"I think that will be quite sufficient to answer my purpose, for my little daughter is only five years old. But I wish her to begin early; and besides, I shall myself be present at the lessons."

Blenda was about to express her gratitude, when the lady continued, "I hope you are not one of those tiresomely timid people who cannot go on with what they are about if they hear people talking round them? For as I wish the lessons to be given between eleven and twelve o'clock, and that is my earliest hour for admitting morning visitors, it is very possible that somebody may come while you are here."

The lady looked enquiringly at Blenda, who, however, answered simply, that she was not so shy as to be unable to continue her instructions if other people were in the room.

"That is well! But now to do things properly, I must ask for a specimen of your powers. Will you be so good as to sit down to the piano, and pray do not let me make you nervous."

"I am only afraid that my performance is not worth the trouble of hearing."

"Oh, I have no doubt it is—just try."

"The fact is, I only learnt to play for the sake of accompanying myself."

"Oh, you sing!—delightful! In that case I must beg you to enter at once upon your office, and sing me a little song. And if I am pleased with it—and I am not fastidious—you may count upon a much higher salary than you would yourself ask."

Blenda sat down to the instrument, feeling delighted with so much kindness.

But what was she to sing? What! did not an inward voice reply? Could it be anything else than the song of the high-souled Bertha in the Castle of Agnes? And inspired by all the tenderest recollections of former years, by the remembrance of her dear old harpsichord and of Sir Egbert, Blenda began:—

With all the fire of chivalry
The German warrior's heart throbs high;
From sea to sea, from land to land,
Waves his banner, gleams his brand—
But Egbert, like the morning star,
Outshines all German heroes far.

Before she could go on the second verse, however, and while, wholly forgetful of the object of her present visit, her spirit was soaring away from earth, borne on the pinions of song, she was interrupted by a burst of uncontrollable laughter; and when, thus roughly recalled to earth, she turned suddenly round, who did she perceive standing at the door of the inner room? who but her fascinating young hostess, and behind her the Chamberlain, who may possibly have represented in his own person the early visitors who were so confidently expected.

Blenda rose with an expression of offended dignity. Was it possible that the lady who had received her so kindly, could permit herself to laugh thus unfeelingly, either at her voice, or at her song, neither of which, Blenda was firmly convinced, afforded any matter for merriment. And then, that the odious Chamberlain should join in the derision—he who had now reasons of his own for disliking her—that was more than she could endure.

"My dear Mademoiselle, do not be offended,

I entreat," said the lady, who, however continued to laugh so immoderately, that, unable to stand, she sank down upon the sofa; "do not be annoyed, I beg; no offence was intended, I assure you, and your voice is very good; but, really, the tone of sentimental heroism with which you sing that old ballad, as if you were absolutely inspired by it, is the most amusing thing I ever witnessed."

The Chamberlain now thought it time to interpose.

"Ah," said he, carelessly, "that is little Mademoiselle von Kühlen, whom I have met at the house of her relation, M. Thorman, the linendraper," . . . and at the same time, he glanced at the lady with an expression which said plainly, "have nothing to do with her."

"Oh!" began the lady, with some hesitation, "is she a young lady of rank? I did not know . . ."

Blenda, however, did not choose to await the second dismissal, which she saw was impending.

"I cannot understand," said she, "why the fact of my belonging to a noble, though poor family, should prove an impediment to my maintaining myself by my own exertions; but, at any rate, it would be but a bad beginning for a teacher—however small her pretensions may be—to be laughed to scorn, even before she has entered upon her office."

She took up her handkerchief and gloves, curtseyed, and left the room before she could be detained, had any one wished to do so.

In the ante-chamber, however, she was overtaken by the lady, who said hurriedly,—

"I have many apologies to make to you, young lady. I hope you will believe that it was far from being my intention to give offence; and although, perhaps, we had better say nothing more about the lessons, I should be very sorry to have given you the trouble of coming hither for nothing. I know that a stranger in a large town (forgive my frankness) may sometimes find herself in embarrassed circumstances, therefore . . ." She would have pressed a bank note into Blenda's hand, but the latter thrust it back, and saying, with an air of great displeasure,—

"I am very glad to *earn* money, but I cannot receive it as alms," she pushed the door open, and ran down the stairs as fast as she could.

* * * * *

"My goodness! my dear young lady, how flushed your cheeks are! and how put out you look!" said the worthy charwoman, who had accompanied Blenda on her painful wanderings.

"Oh, it is nothing, thank you."

"Nothing—yes, indeed so it seems!"

"No matter, it will be all right again soon; and, pray do not let me detain you any longer. I know my way now, and shall soon follow you home, but I want to do a little shopping first."

The good woman did not wait for this injunction to be repeated, for she was always in a hurry.

When she was out of sight, Blenda took

refuge in the first dark entrance that she saw, to give a free course to the tears which she could no longer controul, when she thought of what she had endured, and what was in store for her at home, where she should be obliged to destroy all her mother's hopes.

CHAPTER XX.

AT LAST!

THE poor girl felt quite disconsolate. Forsaken and alone, without counsel, friends, or resources—repulsed, humiliated, and insulted; and, moreover, exhausted by fatigue and excitement, she felt on the point of sinking to the ground in the cold dark entrance, and was compelled to lean on the bannister of the staircase for support.

The song of Sir Egbert, which she loved so dearly, had been laughed to scorn, and she had been treated like a fool; but was it folly to have feelings, because they were not the same as those of other people?

If Blenda had been able to analyse hers at such a moment of trial, she might, perhaps, have confessed that her double failure in obtaining employment did not give her so much pain as the fact that the song of Sir Egbert's high-souled Bertha should have been so mercilessly derided.

The oppression of her heart was, meanwhile, somewhat relieved by her fast-falling tears, and she began to be sensible of the cold which chilled her limbs; she therefore breathed upon her handkerchief, in order to do away with the traces of her tears before she again went out into the street, and was just about to leave the place which had afforded her a refuge from curious eyes, when she perceived two gentlemen descending the stairs, and instinctively drew back into the shadow of the entrance.

Suddenly the tones of an forgotten voice rang upon her ear, the profile of a face, which she had often reproached for appearing to her only in her dreams, was visible in the dim light, and she sprang forward, with the brief and eager exclamation,—

"At last!"

The two gentlemen, who had just reached the threshold, immediately stopped.

One who was bareheaded, and had evidently accompanied his friend down stairs only in order to continue his conversation with him, gazed, in some consternation, at this sudden apparition. But the second, no other than Blenda's knight, exclaiming: "Oh! my little cousin!" took her hand at once so cordially and so frankly, that the bareheaded gentleman merely said, "Well, I congratulate you on this well-timed meeting," and went up-stairs again.

Blenda was scarcely more startled and amazed at her own thoughtless and unseemly behaviour, than at the presence of mind evinced by the Count in giving so plausible a colouring to her forwardness. The poor girl was

ready to drop with shame, astonishment, and at the same time, delight. She did not know which way to look, for she durst not raise her eyes to the face of her companion.

After an eloquent silence of some minutes' duration, the stranger spoke again—this time, however, in a much less familiar tone:—

"Pardon me, Mademoiselle, if I have burdened you with a relationship which you might, perhaps, be unwilling to acknowledge; but I really could devise no better means of shielding us both from curiosity."

"Oh," cried Blenda, "it is rather I who should ask you to forgive my forwardness, which has compelled you to have recourse to an untruth. But," continued she, in a trembling voice, "at that moment I was so agitated and so unhappy, that I forgot everything except that you had once shown yourself a real friend to me."

"And is there anything which could give me greater pleasure than to be looked upon as such by you?" replied he, with a glance which gave double force to his words; "but permit me to continue our conversation on the way home. Whither may I escort you?"

"We live in Knight-street."

"So much the better; it is a long way off. . . . But you are so pale! Good heavens! are you ill?"

Blenda, after the agitation caused by so many conflicting feelings, really did feel very faint. It seemed to her as if she should die of the terrible idea, that the Count might possibly conceive a bad opinion of her. The place and manner of their meeting were all calculated to produce an unfavourable impression on his mind.

"My dear young lady, let me entreat you to take my arm, and to look upon me in the light of a real relation. Be assured that none could feel a more sincere interest in you!"

"But," resumed she, hesitating, and in a tone of deep sadness, "even my conviction of this does not prevent my feeling deeply my inability to determine what is and what is not correct. I would gladly accept your offer—for indeed I can scarcely stand; therefore tell me yourself if it would be proper for me to do so, for I am sure you would not mislead me."

The answer which Blenda received to her frank question was decidedly evasive; for it consisted in this, that her knight, after bestowing upon her an affectionate and encouraging glance, called a coach which happened most opportunely to be driving towards them; and before our heroine had time to think, much less to ask, whether this were more proper, she found herself seated in it, and by her side him whom she still in her own mind designated as the Count.

Before entering, however, he had said a few words to the driver; Blenda did not hear them, but judging by the length of time which it took them to reach Knight-street, she did *not* think they had contained a direction to choose the shortest way.

Her companion inquired with eager interest how she felt; and on her assuring him that she was much better, he went on to say in a tone

of cordial kindness that it would have required a much harder heart than that of our little Blenda to resist:

"Well, then, do give me an account of your fortunes since we parted. My thoughts have been so often busy with them, that I long to know how you have been getting on at Stockholm."

"I will tell you all about it." Blenda's eyes beamed with innocent joy.—How happy she was now!

"And will you be quite candid with me?"

"Of course—I will conceal nothing. You may suppose there have been no lack of events; and this very day. . . . Oh, if you only knew what I have gone through to-day! What vexes me the most is, that it was that odious Chamberlain, whom my uncle the Secretary once silenced so cleverly. . . . but that you know nothing about. . . . First, however, tell me, is it really true that you sometimes remembered the little country girl, who has so much cause to thank you for your recommendation of her to the captain of the steamer?"

"It is as true as that, had not chance thus brought us together, I should have searched Stockholm through in order to find you. . . . But let me beg of you to tell me who you mean by your 'uncle the Secretary,' and 'that odious Chamberlain.'"

The earnestness of the first half of the answer, and the eagerness of the second, were such as entirely to satisfy Blenda. She nodded gaily to herself, and glanced with a smile at the young man sitting beside her, who looked remarkably well, with his elegant fur cloak and dark handsome face; and continued laughing, for she felt as gay as a lark now—

"That is easily told. The Chamberlain is one who, like the Secretary and all the rest, except *you*, thought fit to amuse themselves by flirting with the little country simpleton; but my excellent aunt—she is dead now, and oh, if you knew how I feel her loss!—taught me what value to attach to their unmeaning flatteries, so that I understood them too well to be taken in by them."

Blenda paused, as the remembrance of her aunt arose before her, and the stranger also was silent for a few moments. Then he said, "Forgive me, if I remind you of an expression which you promised me to explain: how was the Chamberlain 'silenced so cleverly?'"

"Oh, this was how it happened. . . . But that you may understand it, I must first tell you that, after my aunt's death, the Secretary turned from a mere admirer into a very real and a very kind friend, through whose means my mother and I were plentifully supplied with employment. He assured us that he was as much in earnest now in his good-will towards us as if he were my uncle, and accordingly so I called him until he went away."

"He is gone away then?"

"Yes, a whole month ago; and it is uncertain when he will return."

"And the Chamberlain?"

"If you had not interrupted me so often, I should have come to him long ago."

"Forgive me; I will not say another word."

"It was one Sunday. I had gone alone, as was often the case, to evening service . . . Well, when I came out of church, the Chamberlain, who had wearied me with his attentions for a long time, had taken up his post at the door, and—for he is very impertinent—would insist upon escorting me home. 'No, thank you,' I replied; 'I can find my own way very well.' . . . 'Oh, my dear young lady,' he persisted, 'you must permit me to be obstinate.' 'No,' I said, 'I will permit you neither to be obstinate nor impertinent; for I am much mistaken if it is not great impertinence thus to force one's company upon a poor girl.' . . . Oh, I assure you that I can stand up for myself," added Blenda, gaily shaking her pretty head.

The gesture was not lost upon her companion. "I see," said he smiling, "that you are quite a heroine.—But pray go on."

"The Chamberlain now went on, eagerly and with some vehemence, to say that he *must* speak to me—that I should not be so cruel if I knew the pain that my coldness gave him, and so forth; and I began to get nervous and impatient, and the tears *would* come into my eyes,—and I am sure I was no heroine when I said, 'Be so good as to go away, for you really frighten me by talking and looking like that.'—But only imagine his having the insolence to persist in offering me his arm!"

"The scoundrel!" muttered the stranger, the colour rising to his cheeks.

"Fortunately at that very moment my Uncle the Secretary, who had also come to escort me back, made his appearance; and no sooner did I see him than I uttered an exclamation of joy, and told him that I had been very much annoyed . . . and, as you may imagine, I glanced at the Chamberlain as I said so . . . But what you cannot imagine, since you did not see it, is the air of patriarchal dignity which the Secretary assumed, as, after saying a few pointed words about intruding one's company upon any woman, he offered me his arm, and led me away. The Chamberlain was quite disconcerted, and I have never seen him again until to-day."

"To-day! was it then to escape from his persecution that you had taken refuge in that dark entrance? And you had been crying—poor girl! If it is that fellow who caused your tears, he shall answer for it to me."

"Oh no—oh no—he did not persecute me, or follow me; he only laughed me to scorn, together with a lady who had sent for me, because—Oh! it was wrong of them."

"I entreat you to be more explicit—who was the lady?"

"I do not know her name. But you see our circumstances are very much reduced, because my mother has been long ill of a low fever; and the Secretary's good old ladies had so many applicants for employment. So my mother insisted that . . ."

"What!"

"That we should advertise. But can you explain to me," she said, suddenly interrupting herself, "how it is that I am telling you all this, as if you were an old acquaintance; and

yet I have never spoken to you but once before? and perhaps I am wrong in being so candid; you have never even told me who you are."

"I will begin by answering your question, before I go on to your objection."

"Very good—let me hear."

"The reason why, as I ventured to hope, you felt confidence in me at the time of our interview at Wenersborg, is this: that you saw and understood, that although I did permit myself an inconsiderate act of gallantry, yet that my words were those of a sincere and upright friend. In short, you perceived that I meant well towards you."

"But if one feels confidence in people merely because of their good intentions, I do not understand why I did not feel any in the agreeable Commercial Traveller who wanted to marry me."

"Did he propose for you, then?"

"Yes, to my aunt! but you see I felt no confidence in him. Afterwards, when things went on so badly with us, I have sometimes thought, I might perhaps have been wrong in this, as well as in another matter."

"Do you regret your refusal, then?"

"No, neither in the one instance, nor in the other; for I should certainly act in the same manner again if I were to find myself placed in the same circumstances."

"Oh! so you have more than once been called upon to decide concerning your fate!"

"Yes. Only imagine that my aunt—to use one of her own expressions—wished to provide me with a protector, in the person of her son, the hat-dresser. Hat-dresser! only think what a title. I could not possibly love a man that bore it. I would rather . . ."

"Surely," said her neighbour, "you cannot seriously mean to assert anything so childish, as that the trade of any man could prejudice your feelings against him. I mean, if the man himself had succeeded in making a favourable impression upon you."

"But I have never seen him!" cried she, laughing. "Though, even if I had seen him a thousand times . . . oh, it sounds so absurd!"

"I am afraid," resumed her companion, in a tone of gaiety, which nevertheless betrayed a trifling degree of constraint; "I am afraid you have some little faults."

"Faults? what are they?"

"Why, either you are proud, or you are romantic, and both qualities are very unfavourable to the attainment of happiness by the simplest means."

"Perhaps I had better plead guilty to the latter accusation. But tell me what you call the simplest means of being happy."

"Not to allow ourselves any higher requirements than we may expect to see satisfied."

"You seem to me to be a philosopher! . . . But for all that, you have never told me your name. And, in order not to add another to the list of my romantic offences, I must know who it is with whom I have been driving, and to whom I have confessed myself."

"Nothing in the world can be more just and reasonable than your demand."

"Oh—so you acknowledge that!" and Blenda listened eagerly, while her eyes sparkled with curiosity and exultation.

"But my dear young lady, reasonable as your demand is, I cannot at present satisfy it; for, although I think I am the last man, of whom it would occur to any one to make a hero of romance, I nevertheless find myself compelled to request that you will permit me to maintain my incognito."

"Indeed? I did not expect that—then shall I not see you again?"

"On the contrary, I hope that I may be so fortunate as sometimes to see you. . . . And as the Secretary enjoyed the privilege of styling himself your uncle, perhaps I might be permitted to retain the title of cousin, which I have already assumed. You have doubtless some relation, whose name and character I might appropriate for the time?"

No one will be surprised that Blenda should see nothing extraordinary in such a proposal.

"Oh," cried she, "that is another admirable idea! My cousin Patrick, the linendraper, is such a thoroughly good-natured man, that I am sure he would forgive our taking such a liberty with his name; but I am afraid Henrietta—that is his wife—would scratch my eyes out, if I borrowed anything that belonged to her."

"But the other cousin?"

"Better and better! You shall assume the character of my cousin John the hat-dresser—capital!" and she laughed like a little mad-cap. . . . "Really, Cousin, that is not at all a bad idea, especially as the real cousin John is not acquainted with any of us; and Stockholm is so large, that not half of its inhabitants can be acquainted with him."

"That is settled then?"

"Yes, that will do beautifully. John Blücher—only think! Dear me, I do believe I might have fallen in love with my cousin, if his name had only been Ivan instead of John. . . . But, seriously, I have one reason for not liking to call you John."

"May I venture to ask what it is?"

"Certainly. My excellent aunt used always to pronounce the name of her favourite son with so much affection, that I do not like to use in jest a name which was uttered in *such* a tone by her lips;—yet I think she would forgive it; I feel sure she would."

"I can but thank you sincerely for this delicacy of feeling, which proves the goodness of your heart, though I hope you will lay aside your scruples. But pray tell me something more of your history, for I am rather more puzzled than enlightened, by the slight sketches you have given me."

"Oh! but we shall never get through half of it."

"Do not say that. I shall not be able to see you again for several weeks. I too have had my trials," continued he, in a tone of deep melancholy; "and I have so much business at present claiming my attention, that I can only grant myself these few minutes of enjoyment. I leave you therefore to judge how painful it would be to me, if this single opportunity,

which we have of conversing freely, undisturbed by curiosity, were to elapse, without my being informed of all that concerns you, everything in which I may have the ability to serve you . . . for that I shall be able to do, even though we may not meet for some time."

"But . . . but" . . . stammered Blenda awaking as it were from a happy dream, "we must be coming to the end of our drive?"

"You see how anxious I am, and yet you seek to evade my request; have you lost your confidence in me?"

"Oh, no. I will try to give you a sketch of my history as briefly as I can."

She thereupon began with the voyage, and went rapidly through the whole of her subsequent life and adventures, for strange to say the drive did not come to an end. And in so doing she so frequently though quite unconsciously, betrayed the impression produced upon her by her first acquaintance, that the said first acquaintance had need of all his self-command in order to refrain from grasping the little hand whose gesticulation gave force to her narrative.

Lastly she confided to her companion the annoyance she had that morning experienced; and when she concluded, his first words were not to thank her for her confidence, but earnestly to entreat that she would decide upon nothing until she had heard from him. "And that," added he, "shall be to-morrow evening. You surely would not again expose yourself to that which you have gone through to-day? Believe me it is more unfitting than you are aware of."

"I wish to Heaven that there were no need for me to do so; but when I go home . . . my poor mother!"

"Tell your mother when you go home that to-morrow she will receive a letter, and that this letter will provide you both with employment which can be in no way injurious to you."

Almost at that moment the carriage stopped at a little distance from Blenda's abode, and she got out. When she had proceeded a few steps, she turned back:

"Cousin John," said she, "you must not imagine that I had *forgotten* to thank you for the books and for the flowers; but I wished to leave that till the very last." And bestowing a smile of unutterable sweetness upon her knight, who acknowledged it with a low bow, she vanished with the speed of lightning.

"To Queen-street," was the gentleman's direction to the driver as he leaned back in the carriage, saying to himself with a sigh—

"Poor, poor little angel!"

CHAPTER XXI.

GOOD TIDINGS.

WHEN Blenda entered her mother's room, she seemed to be treading on air rather than on

the ground. And on trying to relate the great event of the morning, she burst into tears, and appeared altogether in such an excited state, that Madame von Kühlen was quite frightened.

"You have walked too fast, my poor child, and it has sent the blood to your head or to your heart; drink some water, my dear—drink some water directly."

But Blenda might have drank a gallon of water without its producing any effect, for it was now not merely her fancy which was excited, and dissatisfied with the present strove to penetrate the future, but it was her heart which had burst the bounds within which modesty and inability to comprehend her own feelings had hitherto restrain ed it.

"Cannot you speak a rational word, child? Take off your things, at any rate. You will spoil your bonnet, and it is your only one. Well, have you obtained any engagement as teacher?"

"The Count!" exclaimed Blenda aloud; and it seemed as if the utterance of this one magic word had restored to her the gift of speech.

Madame von Kühlen clasped her hands; and then followed a minute detail of the occurrences of the morning up to the time when Blenda parted with her hero, a narrative which caused the dreams of the mother to assume a hue scarcely less brilliant than those of her daughter.

The events which had preceded it, however humiliating for Blenda, were regarded by her merely as poetic shadows indispensable to enhance the brilliancy of the moment in which the Count appeared upon the scene.

"Well, my child! my little Countess," exclaimed she, "was not I right in maintaining that my worthy grandmother's name brings us good luck? It was on the day of St. Concordia that our aunt's letter arrived, just in time for us to reach Wenersborg at the same moment with the illustrious scion of an ancient Scanian family. And this descendant of heroes, this pearl of nobility and wealth—who would have believed it!—was the first who saw you, and whom *you* saw; as if to give the sanction of Heaven to your brilliant prospects."

"Yes, it was extraordinary," murmured Blenda.

"And yet nothing could be less extraordinary, my child; but such are the hidden ways of Providence. And although I had made up my mind to a Russian or German Prince, an English Lord, or a grandee of Spain, I will assuredly not contend against the natural feelings which are implanted by Heaven itself, for that would be sinful, but will with my whole heart bestow my maternal blessing upon your union with the Count."

"Oh! but we are very far from having come to that point, dear Mamma."

"Oh, but you soon will, I make no doubt."

"Who knows?"

"I have heard much of the wealth and luxury of the Scanian nobles," continued Madame von Kühlen, without heeding her daughter's modest doubts, "and I make no doubt that on the day that he presents you at court, he will spare neither trouble nor expence to make your first appearance as brilliant as possible. And one cannot blame a man who is desperately in love if he likes to show off his most costly possession to the best advantage."

"I only wish I may do him credit."

"Oh, as to that, I do not think we need be uneasy, and I am persuaded that their Majesties will receive you very graciously!"

"Perhaps the king himself might kiss you on the forehead—such things have been heard of before now—or present you with a casket of jewels. I had rather he should kiss you though, it would seem a more marked homage to your beauty. And Henrietta, only think of her! the proud, imperious Henrietta, who wanted to drive us back into obscurity in the provinces, will not she be envious and astonished, when she hears of your marriage with the descendant of one of the oldest and most distinguished families in the kingdom!"

"Yes, but then I should make it a point of principle to be so cordial in my manner to her, and so unassuming, that she would forget her ill-will towards me."

"Yes, I know you have too good a heart to be set up by your brilliant fortune; but then the question would be, whether your new family would approve of such intercourse."

"I hope so, for were it otherwise, it would give me great pain."

"Meanwhile as a good relation, you should think of them in another way."

"How do you mean?"

"You must ask your lover, as a favour, to purchase all the fine linen which will be required in your establishment from Patriek, and all articles of luxury from John. I hope that will prove an important order, and make amends to poor John for your refusal of him. And then the little Countess must buy all her perfumery from him, and let her carriage be very often seen at his shop door, that he may have the gratification of saying to his customers: 'Oh look! here comes my cousin, the beautiful Countess Blenda C—creutz. And now Heaven help us! I suppose she will turn everything topsy-turvy as usual. Nothing is good enough for those ladies of quality.'"

"And," added Blenda, laughing, "when he finds that the Count borrowed his name and title of cousin, no doubt he will think that worth imparting to his customers likewise. But what can oblige the Count to adopt this incognito, and how long is it to last?"

"In my opinion, the secrecy he is desirous to observe must be connected with some family or court intrigue; perhaps there is a question of making up a marriage for him; perhaps his honour may be in some way im-

plicated, or he may require the consent of the king. All that time alone can show. Meanwhile, I have not the slightest doubt that the letter which I am to receive from him will give us all the information of which we have need at present."

"But he spoke of its providing us with employment!"

"You little goose, cannot you understand that it was only his delicate way of expressing himself? Employment! I dare say, indeed! But how stupid of me to have been buying flour and fresh butter while you were away, for a huge batch of butter cracknels. I wanted to surprise you by my diligence; but now such surprises are quite superfluous."

"But, good Heavens! then you have spent all the money we had left, Mamma. Now we have nothing to buy meat with, and consequently nothing of which to make broth."

"That does not signify, my dear, I can surely live upon oatmeal porridge until tomorrow, and after that, I dare say we shall not want for anything; the news that you have brought is a better tonic than the strongest beef tea."

"Surely," said Blenda, colouring, and hesitating to give utterance to so absurd a notion, "surely it is not possible that we can be mistaken! . . . No, no, he went into the rooms which we were told were the Count's. We know that the Count was very dark; and when we met the Lieutenant on the stairs, we heard the servant say that the Count was at home."

"My goodness! Child, are you mad? Do you mean that you are beginning to doubt whether the Count is really the Count?"

"I was only thinking of his surprise, when, at our first interview, I inadvertently suggested that he was probably going to Scania; but then, again, when I recollected the circumstance of the handwriting." . . .

"What was that?"

"Do you not remember my telling you, that one day on board the steamer, the Lieutenant took out a quantity of letters and papers, and laid them on the bench beside him, and that I recognised the handwriting in which one of them was directed, as being the same that was on my parcel of books?"

"Oh yes, now I remember, and when you asked whose that beautiful writing was, he replied, that it was a letter of introduction from a young Count C—creutz, who had been our neighbour in the hotel."

"Exactly so."

"Well, and what better proof would you have?"

"Oh, I am quite convinced; such a form and countenance could not belong to any one who was not noble.

* * * * *

It is needless to say that both this and the following day were spent in the erection of similar exaggerated and childish castles in the air.

Our two ladies looked every moment at the clock, and even forgot their oatmeal por-

ridge, so that they might be said literally to live upon air, and also, we must add, upon the imaginary delicacies which were to figure at the *fêtes* given by the future Countess.

Towards six o'clock in the evening a ring was heard at the door of the apartment.

Madame von Kühlen had lighted two candles, that their room might have a brilliant effect from the street. "For," said she to Blenda, "servants are often more particular than their masters, and this trifling expense will be more repaid by the letter."

"It would not be fitting for you to open the door, my little Countess. I will go; the servant may perhaps be the bearer of some costly presents, which it would not do for you to receive in person." And the good lady having wrapped herself in her departed sister's black silk shawl, and trembling so that she could scarcely stand, hurried out into the little ante-chamber, and opened the door.

But how great was her surprise, when, instead of the expected lacquey or *chasseur*, she perceived only a poor old woman with a basket on her arm.

"We do not want anything, good woman," said she, under the impression that the right messenger had not yet made his appearance. But her opinion changed, when the old woman, setting down her basket, began to fumble in her pocket, whence a letter presently made its appearance. And no sooner had she closed the door upon her than Madame von Kühlen hurried back into the room, exclaiming,

"Only think, dear Blenda, to what straits the poor Count's attachment must have reduced him. He actually sent his letter by an errand woman, which plainly proves that his family, who are no doubt spending the winter in Stockholm, keep watch over all his actions."

"Open the letter, dear Mamma, pray. My heart beats so that it makes me quite faint."

"Compose yourself, my child, for whether it be his parents, his brothers and sisters, or a whole legion of love-lorn ladies who keep so strict a watch over him, you may be sure that he will find means, in spite of all impediments, to impart his feelings to the lady of his heart. . . . But—what is this . . . What can this mean?"

Madame von Kühlen had been employed during the delivery of this speech in opening the letter, and as she looked at the signature, she once more exclaimed, "What, in Heaven's name, can this mean?" and continued hesitatingly, "Eleonora Gyllenlake . . . I do not understand."

"It is not from himself, then?" said Blenda, in a disappointed tone, "but let us hear it, nevertheless."

Her mother read as follows:

"MADAM,

"At the request of a friend whose name I have no right to disclose, I have the honour of proposing to afford your daughter

the employment which, as I understand, she is desirous of obtaining.

"The weakness of my eyes prevents me from reading, which is, however, a pleasure that I cannot willingly dispense with; I am therefore anxious to find some one who will undertake to read aloud to me, and if the proposal meets your approbation, I should be glad that the young lady should consider herself engaged to me every afternoon from three to seven o'clock.

"Should she be willing to make a beginning to-morrow, I should be happy to pay her the first quarter's salary in advance.

"I may as well mention, at the same time, that having undertaken to furnish the *trousseau* of my niece, I shall require a good deal of needlework done of various kinds, a subject upon which we can enter more in detail by word of mouth.

"I remain, Madam,

"Yours, respectfully,

"ELEONORA GYLLENHAKE"

"Queen Street, No. —."

Our two friends sat gazing at each other in silence for a moment, and then the mother, who happily had always some explanation at hand for everything, exclaimed:

"Ah! I understand. He has a rich old aunt, whom he has won over to his side, and who, being anxious to see you, makes use of this pretext. Perhaps, too, it may be his wish to prove you, and hence to leave you under an erroneous impression for a time. But do not be disheartened. And if this proposal of work should be carried out in earnest, do not show any surprise; the day will come when he will convert your darkness into dazzling light."

"Yes," cried Blenda, with enthusiasm, "I will show myself wiser than poor simple Amy Robsart. If *she* had waited patiently, as Lord Leicester so earnestly entreated her to do, she would not have been exposed to all the bitter enmity, which at length cost her her life."

"Hush! an idea strikes me. It was only for the sake of giving you *that* book, that he made you a present of all the rest. Don't you see? the powerful favourite of Queen Elizabeth did not venture openly to avow his connexion with the obscure country gentleman's daughter. . . . But, my child, there may be favourites, who, thank God, have *other* reasons for their silence. *You* are under the protection of your mother; and besides, he will, of course, be too prudent to admit any one that is not to be depended upon into the secret of his love affairs."

"But these love affairs must soon be openly acknowledged," said Blenda, with a look of pride, which showed that the warning conveyed by the fate of Leicester's unhappy bride, had not been altogether sufficient for her.

"Oh," exclaimed her mother, "here is a postscript which I had not seen."

"A trustworthy person will accompany the young lady home every evening."

"No doubt that means himself," cried Blenda.

"Yes, that is easy to guess; and upon mature consideration, I see no reason why I should disapprove of this little innocent mystery."

CHAPTER XXII.

COUSIN JOHN IN PERSON.

"Oh! indeed," said Henrietta, with a dignified air of indifference, "so he is returned at last? Will he honour us with his company this evening?"

"Why, how coldly you speak of John, my love! . . . I always thought that he stood alarmingly high in your favour."

Henrietta, who was comfortably ensconced in an arm-chair before the fire, thrust her screen aside as she replied, "My dear Patrick, how deplorably simple you are!"

Am I indeed? I was not aware of it," replied her husband, laughing; "but as you are so sharp, we can make up for each other's deficiencies."

"Will your brother come here this evening?"

"Of course he will. I have given him a piece of my mind for not having come to dinner. But, although it is now more than three months since my mother died—ah! she was a very good mother, and I loved her dearly, and I sometimes feel such a longing to hear her scold me again that I am ready to burst out crying—but that is not what I was going to say; I meant that although my mother has been dead more than three months, of course, all John's grief is revived by his return home. He always had such a good heart."

"And now that he has been so long abroad, I suppose he will be more of a fine gentleman than ever."

"My dear, are you quite mad? Is it his fault that he is better looking than I am? For, as to his heart, that, I protest, is no bigger than mine. John is an excellent fellow, and esteemed by every one, and I never felt the slightest envy of him, although it did once occur to me, when I was standing beside him in his warehouse, that people took me for the shopman!"

"John's shopman, indeed!" repeated Henrietta, with a scornful giggle—"I should think that, with my money, you might get on in the world just as well as he!"

"To be sure I might, as far as money is concerned, although John is nearly as rich as I am now; but hang it! when we are together, it is always the same thing, John is John, and Patrick is Patrick—well, never mind, that is no fault of ours."

"Yes, it is your fault in some degree," cried Henrietta still more sharply.

"How can that be?"

"To be sure it is. Why do you always depute him to represent you? Who was it that almost obliged John to go with me to the ball at the Exchange, instead of you? Who is it that is always begged to get places and tickets whenever we go to see any of the State ceremonies? Who is it that must speak for you when you have company at home? You cannot even propose the health of some trumpery guest, but it is John who must begin—"Gentlemen, it is our host's pleasure to call upon me, &c. &c. &c." It is quite unbearable. I hardly know how I can put up with it any longer!"

"My dear Henrietta, you were perfectly aware of what I was beforehand, and it is quite unreasonable now, for no reason whatever, to cast in my teeth my incapacity for making speech. . . ."

"May I not be excused from listening to any more?"

"With all my heart—the subject is not so very agreeable."

"You may as well be informed now, however, that I wish to go to the anniversary Festival of the Swedish Academy, and that you must come with me."

"No thank you. I should be bored to death! I have no doubt John will be so kind!"

"Did I not know that John would be again brought forward? Listen! It is just such simpletons of husbands as you are that drive their wives to think of other men."

"What? What do you mean? I do not understand you. Do you think of other men?"

Henrietta burst into a violent fit of laughter, so absurd did she consider the expression of simple astonishment assumed by her husband.

"Well, well, you little goose, laugh as much as you please, there is no harm in laughing; but you must think of no one but me, for, good-natured as I am, devil take me if I would not go near to kill any one whom I found poaching on my preserves."

"Faugh! what a vulgar expression!"

"I thought it was a mighty genteel one. But, to be serious, dear Henrietta, I think it is very wrong in us to have taken no heed of Aunt Emerentia for so long a time. My conscience smites me for having quite forgotten her and Blenda latterly. You will see that John will not be pleased."

"He may be displeased, and may find fault with whoever he likes, but I shall absolve myself from the necessity of listening. Goodness! here he is already, I believe! Go out into the hall, do, and see if it is he. . . ."

Patrick hastened out, and Henrietta pressed her hand first to her heart and then to her eyes—"Oh," sighed she, "I know I might have been accused of a little flirtation with the Chamberlain; but that was mere vanity. His presence does not cause me even the smallest excitement. . . . and yet I feel as if I were suffocating if I but hear the footsteps of him. . . . him who despised and rejected me. . . . but he shall not have the triumph of perceiving this miserable weak-

ness, which may, perhaps, have been the principal cause of his journey."

At that moment the door of the elegant drawing-room was opened, and Patrick re-entered, accompanied by a tall gentleman-like looking man, with a pale but attractive countenance; the ease and native dignity of whose demeanour formed as striking a contrast to Patrick's air of jolly good-humour, as did the good taste and simplicity of his attire with the ill-chosen finery of the latter, who, in spite even of his mourning, could not abstain from glittering shirt pins, a gold chain across his waistcoat, and a general servile imitation of the *Journal des Modes*, which did not set off his short thick-set person to any great advantage.

The genuine cousin John, whom we here beg leave to introduce to our readers, advanced towards his sister-in-law, and kissed her with fraternal cordiality, while, of all that she had purposed saying to him, she could only utter the single word, "Welcome."

"Thank you, dear Henrietta," said John, with a kind pressure of her hand; "this greeting is all the more precious to me, that I can receive it now from none but you," and a tear glistened in his dark eyes as he spoke.

"But," continued he, after a moment's pause, as no one had the heart to reply to this mournful allusion—"I have some new relations here—perhaps they too might bid me welcome."

"That is not so very unlikely," said Patrick, rubbing his forehead as he spoke; "but somehow,—I don't know how it has happened—we have not heard of them for some little time."

"Are they not still living in my mother's house?"

"No; they would not keep the room through the winter. How was that, Henrietta? You were the first to speak to them on the subject, so of course you can explain! I have been so overwhelmed with business, that I have not had much time for visiting."

"But it is impossible that you can have left entirely to themselves two friendless women, to whom my mother had promised her protection?" asked John, while a shade of displeasure clouded his brow.

By this time Henrietta had quite made up her mind what line to take, and interposed with, "My dear brother, if this subject interests you so much that you must begin upon it at the first moment of your arrival, I am quite ready to answer you."

"That is right; for you have had entirely your own way about it," observed Patrick ("always excepting in those matters of which you know nothing," added he to himself), "so you may explain it all to John, while I go to get some wine."

"What does Patrick mean by saying that you have had entirely your own way about it? I am sure, my dear Henrietta, you can have wished nothing but that which was right, and due to the memory of your mother-in-law."

"I should find it very difficult to interpret

Patrick's meaning—my own I can readily explain with regard to these ladies, whom I must confess, I am very glad not to be obliged to reckon amongst *my* relations."

"I should imagine that being your husband's relations, they must be yours also."

"No, no, I cannot agree to that; it is true I have heard that when people marry they have their worldly goods in common, but you must excuse me if I do not see the necessity for a community of relations also."

"It exists nevertheless. But setting this aside, tell me how these ladies have incurred your displeasure."

"In a thousand ways."

"Please to specify them."

"I will say nothing of their awkwardness, nor of the absurd blunders into which they are betrayed by their folly and ignorance of the customs of civilized society, nor of the remarkable degree of coquetry which the little minx, Blenda, conceals under a semblance of innocence; and the fact, that on occasions when any well-bred woman would know how to keep her feelings under restraint, she utters affected exclamations and outcries of delight, which attract the attention of all present, as was the case one evening when we took her with us to see Gauthier's horsemanship."

"But none of these things seem to me of great importance, if she were told kindly of her defects."

"Yes, I should like to see anybody that could improve her! Even my mother-in-law, who had never before shown, perhaps, a weakness for any one, was yet so weak with regard to this silly child, that she was quite unable to correct her of her faults."

"Perhaps she did not perceive them."

Henrietta made believe not to hear this last observation, and continued, "That which makes me feel most angry with Miss Blenda, is, that it was probably her obstinacy and ingratitude, and nothing else, which caused my mother-in-law's death."

"How can you permit yourself to utter such an accusation, Henrietta! Whatever may be the feeling which actuates you, you assuredly allow it far too much license!"

"You think so?" cried the lady with a contemptuous smile.

"I certainly do."

"Well, we shall see. I suppose you will not deny that your mother proposed her to you as a wife."

"I have no wish to deny it; and more than that, I acknowledge that the description she gave me of my cousin pleased me so well, that I promised her to take the matter into consideration on my return."

"Oh! so you gave that promise?"

"Yes, and with the full intention of keeping it. You see therefore that I have ample cause, besides our relationship, to feel an interest in these ladies."

"You will then the better understand my feelings when I learnt that your mother—I know not for what reason—did not await your return, in order to impart your highly

flattering offer to her favourite, but proceeded to do so at once in her own name."

"Well?" and a slight tinge of colour for a moment suffused John's pale, handsome face.

"She refused you, and that so positively as to irritate your mother to the greatest degree."

The young man's countenance wore an expression of mistrust, as he asked—

"And pray, who heard all this?"

"If you *must* know, it was Deborah, who has since entered our service, who overheard the whole conversation. She is entirely to be trusted; and she assured me that your mother at first reasoned with her in the kindest way, and when this proved to be useless, angrily commanded her to leave the room; and a few hours after . . ."

"Go on!"

"She was seized with the attack which . . . which that same evening brought her life to a close."

"Then did not my cousin see my mother again?" asked he, after a pause.

"Yes, she did. Nor can I deny that your mother showed her concern for her even in her last moments."

"Ah! that is just like her; and I am sure that she would reproach you, could she have heard the cruel words you spoke just now, in accusing a poor girl of being the cause of her last illness—which the doctor assures me he had long foreseen—because she refused to marry a man utterly unknown to her. And I too should be tempted to reproach you, did I not believe that yours were merely words spoken without sufficient consideration, and called forth by the recollection of the loss we have sustained."

"Interpret my words as pleases you best! I thought you would have taken a refusal rather more to heart."

"You attach more importance to this matter than it deserves; I cannot in reality be said to have received a refusal, since I neither asked Blenda in marriage myself, nor empowered any other person to do so for me. My cousin rejected the proposal which my mother brought forward merely as her own wish—that is all."

"But suppose it were not all!" resumed Henrietta, with a mocking smile, "suppose I had afterwards heard from the mouths of both the ladies . . ."

"Well, what?"

"Oh, merely that, whatever might befall them, they should never regret this refusal. Forgive me if I use the term, for want of a better."

"And is it possible that *you* could have thought proper to interfere in such an affair; a thing which, at the very utmost, a mother might be justified in doing?"

"Do not take up the matter so seriously, my dear brother-in-law. I assure you I did not consider myself by any means entitled to plead your cause. But the determination they expressed induced me to advise them to return to their native place; for which pur-

pose I offered them money to defray their travelling expenses; and I do not understand why they did not take my advice."

"And was that all! did you offer them nothing more?"

"My dear John, what have I to do with them? I consider that I am perfectly justified in withdrawing my hand from people who are so insane as to refuse a good offer, when it would release them from their difficulties; and I have acted accordingly. I did not choose that they should have the needlework from our shop, whilst others wanted it who deserved it better."

"And Patrick let you do as you pleased?"

"Yes, to be sure. Would you have had Patrick quarrel with his wife on account of two foolish women, whose character, too, appears to me to be somewhat questionable? for although I have had no direct communication with them since they changed their abode, yet one thing or another has come to my ears concerning them nevertheless."

"For instance? . . ."

"That they receive the visits of a certain Royal Secretary, a former admirer of the young lady . . . and that a certain Chamberlain, whose reputation is anything but questionable, has taken little pains to conceal his pursuit of the young lady, which would of course be impossible if he had not met with some encouragement."

"My dear Henrietta," replied Mr. John Blücher, with one of the peculiar smiles which he had at command, "we must never judge of a woman by the character of the person who may do homage to her beauty. We might otherwise chance to fall into grievous error."

"Indeed!"

"Undoubtedly! . . . For instance, can you conceive that report should have designated that identical Chamberlain as your own admirer—nay more, should have hinted that his visits to Henrikslund were frequent enough to have disturbed the domestic peace of a home of which the master had been less good-natured than our excellent Patrick?"

"Oh! that is shameful—disgraceful! But it is needless for me to defend myself against such absurd accusations."

"Of course;—that would be to inflict a very unnecessary humiliation upon yourself; and my only reason for alluding to the circumstance was to prove to you how easily and how causelessly the reputation of an innocent woman may be attacked."

Henrietta's feelings had now reached such a pitch that she was obliged to keep silence; her heart beat so fast as nearly to suffocate her, and she longed for fresh air. Never before had she felt so distinctly as she now did that she *hated* Blenda."

"My dear sister," presently said her unmoved brother-in-law, in quite a different tone, "I have a favour to ask of you."

"What is it? you know that I shall grant it if I possibly can."

"If that is the case, you will not refuse to invite my cousin and her mother to your house, some day soon."

"Invite them hither!"

"Yes. Why not?"

"They have never yet been here! No, no, dear John, that would be too disagreeable. For three months their pride has not allowed them to humble themselves to ask for my protection; and you would have *me* invite them?"

"For my sake, Henrietta!" and he took her hand, and fixed his eyes persuasively upon her.

She withdrew her hand vehemently. "No, no!" exclaimed she, "I will not have it—you hear? I do not choose it."

"In that case, Patrick must choose it. I shall find means to ask this of him in my mother's name—you know that I have some influence over him . . . Are we, therefore, to begin a struggle against each other, or will you consent yourself to suggest that they should be invited to dinner on Sunday? Choose which of the two alternatives pleases you best."

"Oh, it is indeed presumption to impose such a choice upon me!"

"But what can I do? I am determined to see them; and after what has passed, it would hardly do for me to visit them—"

"Well . . . I will consider of it . . . But now let us say no more on this subject—I hear Patrick coming."

* * * * *

During the remainder of the evening, the conversation turned exclusively upon the mother whom both her sons so sincerely deplored. But as Patrick accompanied his brother down stairs, he said,—

"For the sake of peace and quietness, I have not appeared to interfere in anything; for, you know, Henrietta has her little whims. . . . But I have done all that I could for my aunt. I paid for her first quarter's rent, and laid in a stock of wood for her, and if you choose we will in future pay her quarter's rent alternately."

"I will gladly join you in so doing, provided only that all passes through your hands. . . . But promise me that you will go and look after them as soon as possible."

"That you may depend upon! I quite long to see them."

CHAPTER XXIII.

BLENDA ENTERS UPON HER SITUATION.

THE day following the events recorded in the preceding chapter, our heroine, buoyed up with secret but brilliant hopes, set out in search of the old lady who had written the letter to her mother.

The address given, as the reader may remember, was that of a house in Queen-street, * and Blenda fancied that it must resemble a palace; for a lady of the highest rank, who

* The longest and handsomest street in Stockholm.

most probably formerly held a post at court, could not inhabit any less splendid dwelling. And her expectations were so far justified,—it proved to be one of the handsomest edifices in the street.

Blenda, who had obtained no further directions, thought she must enquire on the first floor; she therefore ascended the stairs, and rang the bell, but found that the apartment was occupied by a foreign minister, so it could not be there.

"Well, then, it must be on the second floor." —Wrong again; that was the abode of a colonel.

"On the third floor, then!" No, not right yet: the third floor had been taken by a commissioner of the bank.

The fourth floor was occupied by a milliner, and the fifth by a small tailor.

"How strange!" thought Blenda; and she began to descend one flight of stairs after the other, reflecting the while whether it were possible that the distinguished Aunt could live on the ground-floor. . . "But perhaps," thought she, "she may be in ill-health, so that she may find it more convenient to have no stairs to climb."

Having come to this conclusion, our aspiring heroine proceeded to seek her fortune on the ground-floor; and, on her repeated knocking, the door was opened by a little maid.

"Does Mrs. Gyllenhake live here?"

"Yes. Please to walk in."

Blenda imagined that it was a comfortable servants' room into which she was conducted; for the plain furniture, and the somewhat worn and faded carpet, did not seem to her at all suitable to an apartment destined to receive the visitors of a lady of rank. Be that as it might, she saw no other, but was presently invited, by a friendly voice, to enter the adjoining room,—an equally unpretending bed-chamber.

"Mademoiselle von Kühlen, I believe?" said her hostess, a plainly dressed, elderly lady, whose appearance was calculated to command respect, and who was seated in an arm-chair, with a table and her knitting before her.

"Yes, that is my name; and I have no greater wish than to gain the approval of her who has done me the favour to send for me," replied Blenda, with a low curtsy; for, despite the somewhat unattractive appearance of the surrounding objects, there was something so kind and pleasing about Mrs. Gyllenhake herself, that Blenda at once felt attracted towards her.

"I am sure of that, my dear child; and am no less sure that we shall soon be such good friends, that you will really like to come to me."

These kind words caused everything upon which Blenda's eyes rested to assume a more congenial aspect; and when candles were lighted, and she looked around her, laying aside her brilliant and exaggerated expectations, the little bedroom, with its old-fashioned furniture, appeared to her so warm, tranquil, and comfortable, that she reproached herself for her former folly, as she thought :—"Three days

ago I should have looked upon such a refuge as the height of happiness; and if *he* who displays such interest in me has preferred it to all others, it is doubtless because he sees it to be best for me still to work for my own maintenance. And I really think that the feelings of pride of which I have been conscious since the day before yesterday, were very likely to do me harm."

* * * * *

The first evening of Blenda's entrance upon her new office was chiefly passed in conversation. The old lady informed her "*lectrice*" that she was fond of variety; and that, therefore, they would not confine themselves exclusively to light literature, but likewise go through a little course of history, and other improving subjects, which might give them occasion to converse upon what they had read. "For," added she, cheerfully, "though I am an old woman, and no longer live in the world, yet I used formerly to do so, and therefore find much pleasure in conversation. Next to that, my greatest delight is in music; so I shall have my old piano-forte in the next room tuned, and then you can try it."

"Oh!" said Blenda, recollecting her last unlucky attempt, "I know so little of music."

"But perhaps you sing?"

"Yes, I think I can a little,—at least, I used to think so."

After this acknowledgment, the old lady would hear of no excuses, but insisted on judging for herself. And she did not laugh at Blenda's singing, but smiled kindly upon her (for the poor girl seemed rather agitated), as she said,—

"Your voice will be a beautiful one with a little good teaching. I am acquainted with a clever music-master, to whom I had formerly the opportunity of rendering some small services; and if, as I believe, he has not forgotten them, I will now call upon him for repayment."

Blenda was in a flutter of delight, as she raised her eyes, with deep thankfulness, to those of her kind hostess. And the hours slipped away so rapidly in conversation upon various subjects, that Blenda thought they must have wings.

About seven o'clock tea was served, and then it was time to go home.

"Caroline, is the watchman here?" asked Mrs. Gyllenhake of her little maid; and, on receiving an affirmative answer, the old lady took leave of her new acquaintance, placed the first quarter's salary in her bag, and assured her that it was long since she had spent so pleasant an evening, and that she should be very glad to see her the next day.

"And will you allow me to ask about the work?" said Blenda, who feared lest this important point should be forgotten.

"I will send some pieces of linen to-morrow, and then we can consider further about the cutting out, and so forth. My niece is not particular about expense, provided the work is as good as possible."

Blenda now departed.

Her heart beat fast as she stepped out into the entrance.

She reproached herself for her folly in supposing that the Count would assume such a disguise; yet she could not banish from her imagination a tall figure wrapped in a cloak, until she saw before her a little man in a grey overcoat, holding a lantern in his hand, whose smooth light hair did not bear the remotest resemblance to the clustering raven locks of her knight.

"That is the watchman, who is to go home with you, Ma'am," said the little maid; and they went forth together into the street, where it must be owned that Blenda gazed somewhat eagerly to the right and left; but unfortunately nothing was to be seen, and she returned home without having met with the faintest shadow of an adventure.

Her mother was awaiting her return with a degree of impatience, which did not arise from curiosity alone, as she too had something to impart.

* * * * *

"Well, my child, my little Countess, what have you been doing? What did the lady say to you? And who was the man who escorted you home?"

Such were the mother's first eager questions. Blenda related everything, and Madame von Kühlen's astonishment rose higher and higher as she listened.

"What!" exclaimed she, as Blenda concluded; "was the Count not even mentioned?"

"No; Mrs. Gyllenbake did not make the slightest allusion to the person who had recommended me to her; but it is very evident from her kindness, that the recommendation was urgent, and her society will be in itself a great acquisition to me."

"I have no doubt of that, my child; but still . . ."

"She is so pleasing, and so clever—and I shall have to read a great deal that will be very useful to me. And then the music and singing; oh, if anything should really come of that, as she promised!"

"That's it, is it? Oh! now I have it all!"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, that I think he wishes your education to be completed, and your talents cultivated in such a way that you should not be conscious of owing it to him, but should believe yourself indebted only to the kindness of the old lady. I must say, that shows great delicacy of feeling, and is exceedingly correct and proper. And the more pains you take to improve, the more you will hasten your introduction to the family. But did you receive the quarter's salary?"

Blenda opened her bag—and it will be readily imagined, that even while expecting still greater good fortune, our ladies were not a little delighted at the sight of fifty rix-dollars.

"Did you ever before see so much money at once, Mamma?"

"Never but once, child, and that was when I looked into poor Regina Sophia's bureau. . . . Now you must have a winter cloak, and a new bonnet."

"Oh! no, indeed! We must first set aside the money for the rent, and then lay in some

stores. You know you have not yet quite recovered your strength."

"Well, well, we will not quarrel about that. But how very right and kind it is of the Count not to lend us money in his own name."

"Oh! of course he feels that I would not accept the least trifle from him, until he offers me everything!"

"Quite right, my child! and be sure that your trial will not last long. . . . But now listen to what I have to tell. I have had a visit."

"Who from, Mamma? Not, surely, from Cousin John?"

"No; he is arrived though. . . . But my visit was from Deborah, who has had a touch of fever too, or she would have been to see us long ago. It is true she said she came of her own accord; but I could see plainly enough that it was Henrietta who had sent her."

"Oh, no, mother; Henrietta would not trouble her head about us."

"That may be; but perhaps some one else may?"

"Who?"

"My respected grandmother, who had seen the world, used to say that it was only those who were stupid themselves, who thought it was easy to throw dust in the eyes of others. And it certainly showed no great penetration on Henrietta's part to suppose that I should be caught by such a bait."

"Oh, do speak plainly, Mamma. You make me quite curious."

"Why, you see, after Deborah had informed me of Mr. John Blücher's arrival, she told me that he would dine at Patrick's next Sunday, and that some other guests would be invited to meet him. And after that she added, as if by chance: 'And I am sure that you, Ma'am, and the young lady, would be invited too, if Miss Blenda would find any pretext for calling upon my mistress during the week.'"

"Well, that seems to me to have been a very friendly overture upon the whole."

"Do you not understand, child, that it is only the influence of the brother-in-law which has effected such a change? . . . So I said—and I think it was a very good answer—'Oh! a visit from Blenda cannot possibly alter Henrietta's feelings, after she has distinctly stated, that she would have nothing more to do with us. No, thank God! all are not like her. And if we are subjected now and then to a little temporary embarrassment, yet we are not altogether without protection.'"

"But why should I not call upon Henrietta if she wishes it; it would be very pleasant for me."

"What are you thinking of, child? Do you think the Count, your lover, would be pleased if he saw you willing to jump at the very first opportunity of meeting your former suitor!" And as Blenda remained silent and thoughtful, she continued—"As for the dinner—for at last Deborah did give a sort of positive invitation from her mistress—that is merely an excuse for him to be able to meet you as if by chance; and such a meeting could not be otherwise than very embarrassing for us. You know

that a marriage between him and you was poor Regina Sophia's last wish, and it is very possible that he might consider himself bound in honour to fulfil it."

"Yes, that is true; and I should feel very shy and uncomfortable in his society. I dare say it is best that I should think no more about making Cousin John's acquaintance; though I own I am very curious to see him."

"So am I; because poor Regina Sophia talked so much about him. But it will be time enough to make acquaintance with him when your marriage with the Count has taken place, and you have been openly acknowledged by his family."

"Yes, perhaps it would be most correct that I should wait until then—that is, if nothing unforeseen happens to prevent it."

CHAPTER XXIV.

OVERTURES REJECTED.

THE next morning brought Patrick himself to visit his aunt and cousin.

He apologised good-humouredly for his past neglect, and said he was now come to tell his aunt that she must be under no further anxiety as to her rent, for the payment of it would in future be his concern, and that moreover she was again to have the making of the dressing-gowns for his warehouse.

"I assure you, my dear Nephew," replied Madame von Kühlen, in a tone in which gratitude mingled with pride—"I assure you that your kindness is not bestowed on ungrateful people. I hope, however, that we may not very long stand in need of it, as it always seems hard to live on the bounty of others. It however gives me real pleasure to find that I was right; for during my long illness, when it seemed as if we had been forsaken by all the world, I said to Blenda—Patrick has been kept away by business, or by some other cause—not by his own free will, for he has an excellent heart."

"Thank you, my dear Aunt, for having done me justice so far. I am so fond of both you and my little cousin, that hang me if I should not be delighted to have you both to live with me, if . . . it were not altogether impossible. Well, Cousin Blenda, and how goes the world with you?"

"Oh! as well as can be. I feel as gay as a lark, for we are promised plenty of work, and abundant pay; and besides". . . Blenda nodded her pretty head, as was her wont when she wished to give particular emphasis to her words.

"Well?"

"I do not exactly know whether I ought to tell all that has happened," and she looked at her mother.

"Oh! you can tell something, at any rate, to your cousin Patrick, who takes so kind an interest in you. Go on, my dear."

"Do. I am quite curious."

"An excellent old lady heard of us, and sought us out; and she gives me fifty dollars a-quarter to read aloud to her every afternoon for a few hours. And more than this—though it is almost too good to be true—she has a friend who is a music and singing master, and she means to have me taught by him."

"Well, upon my word! You must have been born with a silver spoon in your mouth; though, to be sure, there is nothing so very much out of the way in that neither. I thought you were going to tell me of a marriage in prospect. There! only look how she blushes. That is always the way with girls at the least allusion to love and marriage."

Madame von Kühlen was very near giving way to the temptation of informing Patrick that he was not so far wrong, when an anxious look from Blenda reminded her that the interests and secrets of the Count were too important to be thus sacrificed; so with heroic self-denial she bit her lips and remained silent.

"Well," began Patrick again, "I was to give you Henrietta's kind regards, and to invite you, in her name, to eat your dinner with us next Sunday."

"But, my dear Nephew, you must perceive that it must be some weeks yet before I can venture out. I am still so weak from my fever, that I can barely crawl about the room."

"Yes, indeed, my dear Aunt, you do look very ill; but I will send you a few bottles of port wine, to bolster you up a little. Meanwhile there is nothing to prevent Blenda from coming. I assure you the invitation is from Henrietta herself."

"It is very kind of her to trouble herself about us; but, to be quite candid with you, you see it would be very embarrassing for the child."

"Embarrassing! how so?"

"Why, John will be there."

"Oh! he is not difficult to get on with; he does not embarrass anybody."

"But you don't understand me."

"That I certainly don't."

"You surely know what was your poor mother's wish?"

"Yes, I have heard of it, although she never mentioned it to me; but I know she wished to have Blenda for her daughter-in-law; and I can tell you, dear Aunt, that should her wish come to be fulfilled, my little cousin there might think herself a very lucky woman."

"Yes, very likely; but now, if she were to dine with you on Sunday, it would look as if she came to meet him."

"What does that signify? Let her be never so bashful and modest, she can surely meet her unmarried cousin at her married cousin's house. They must meet some time or other."

"Why must they? Blenda gave her answer to poor Regina Sophia. She does not wish to marry at present; and I will not

have her placed in a situation from which she would have great difficulty in extricating herself."

"Well, devil take me if you two are not more absurd than anything I ever dreamt of! The idea of refusing John before he has even proposed! However, Blenda may come with perfect security, for if he hears only half of what I have heard just now, I am sure he would not give a snap of his fingers for her—if even he ever had any serious thoughts of her." For once the good-natured Patrick was really angry.

"I will defend my daughter's honour to my last gasp," retorted Madame von Kühlen, growing angry in her turn; "and, absurd or not absurd, her cousin John shall have no opportunity of scorning her. No, never shall it be said that he rejected her, in return for her rejection of him."

Blenda thought it was now high time to interpose: "Oh, pray," cried she, "do not let us talk any more about John—I am scarcely more than a child, and it is merely out of shyness, and because I have heard so much about my cousin, that I have not courage to meet him just yet. But, Patrick, pray do not be angry with us on that account. Give my love to Henrietta. In a little while, when all this has been forgotten, I shall come with the greatest pleasure."

Patrick rose. He was no longer angry, but he thought his relations so strange, that he did not wish to spend any more time with them at present.

"Thank heaven that he is gone at last!" exclaimed Madame von Kühlen, in a tone expressive of the triumph that she fancied she had gained.

"But he was displeased with us."

"The Count would probably be still more displeased. Who knows whether he would not be beside himself with jealousy, if he knew how hard John had laboured to see you! And, don't tell me that it means nothing. It means a great deal, and might have led to a duel before we knew where we were."

"And to a journey beyond the frontiers, heaven only knows how far," added Blenda.

Sunday came, and John Blücher entered the drawing-room of his pretty sister-in-law, and cast a searching glance around. Henrietta was sitting alone at the window, looking intently in the looking-glass.*

"I suppose you are watching for our relations?" said her brother-in-law, after a friendly greeting. "I should not have suspected them of keeping us waiting so long."

"No, my dear John, it would be useless for me to watch for them—they are not coming."

"Not coming?" asked John, and a slight shade of displeasure clouded his brow; "you had promised me to invite them."

* It is the custom in several of the northern countries of Europe, to fasten small looking-glasses outside the windows, placed so as to reflect the whole length of the street

"And I did even more than I promised," replied Henrietta, rather sharply; "for first I sent an invitation by Deborah, which was refused, and then I sent Patrick to *persuade* them to come—but in vain."

"And what was the reason assigned?"

"It would be more courteous in me to conceal the truth from you, but that is more than I can do."

"So much the better."

"Or the worse—they would not hear of making your acquaintance on any terms."

"Really?"

"It is a fact."

"But what can they be afraid of? Do they suppose that I wish to force myself upon the poor girl?"

"Why, it looks like it—I mean it looks as if *they* thought so . . . meanwhile, thus much is evident, that they wish to be spared all further invitations from us, being under the impression that they originate with you—and so far they are right."

"Well, then, let them take their own way," replied the young man, not in the offended tone of a disappointed lover, but in that of a reasonable man dismissing a childish idea, which had occupied his mind for a time: "we will say no more about it."

Henrietta was triumphant. She could have desired nothing better, and it was an easy matter to her to forget that there existed in the world two such insignificant beings as Madame von Kühlen and her daughter.

* * * * *

It was long since Mrs. Patrick had appeared to such advantage as she did on this occasion. John was there; he was occupied with no one else, and what more could she wish. She had no one to be jealous of—and is not the absence of pain sometimes more than actual happiness. Moreover, the day seemed destined to be in all respects a pleasant one to her.

Amongst Patrick's letters was one from Henrietta's only brother, who was married and settled at S——, containing a pressing invitation to Patrick and Henrietta to come and spend Christmas at his house, bringing John with them, if it were possible to persuade him to come. He promised to amuse them well; for the society of the place was agreeable, and Henrietta might look forward to at least ten balls, to say nothing of sleighing parties and other minor gaieties.

"Oh, by all means let us go! I have long wished to make acquaintance with my sister-in-law, and William and I were always great allies."

"But, my love, it is a desperately difficult matter to be away for a whole fortnight—upon my honour."

"Oh, dear Patrick, don't be detestable. Surely the shopmen can measure out linen, without your being always there to look after them. I am certain John will support me. You know I have never been further from Stockholm than Upsala."

"Yes. What do you think, John? Is Henrietta to have her own way about this as

usual!" Patrick made this appeal rather anxiously; for though exceedingly fond of amusing himself, he was nowhere so much in his element during the day as in his shop.

"To be sure she is," replied John, in a tone of decision which delighted Henrietta. "You would not begin to enact lord and master at the end of the year?"

"No, indeed!" said Patrick, laughing; "it would not be at all worth while to begin before we come home for the new year. But then, my love, you must make up your mind to dance to my tune."

This expression was Henrietta's especial aversion. On this occasion, however, she barely turned up her nose, and answered gaily, "Oh, yes, I have no objection—that is, when I have danced my fill to a different one. I promise you, you shall rule the roast while I rest."

"Very well, very well—thank ye, my dear. . . . But now, John, will you come with us? for, if you do, we can go shares in a carriage."

Henrietta's heart beat fast, but she did not speak.

"Henrietta, will you not persuade your brother-in-law to give us his company?"

"There is no need of persuasion," interposed John. "What enjoyment could I, as a bachelor, expect to find in spending Christmas at home, now that our poor mother is no longer here to gladden us with her presence?"

"Then it is settled; you will come with us?"

"Certainly."

"That is capital! We will enjoy ourselves famously,—only pray do not encumber us with too much luggage, Henrietta;" and Patrick went off to prepare a card-table for the other guests.

"I do not know," said Henrietta in a low voice, as she cast a doubtful glance at her brother-in-law,—"*I do not know whether Paris is a good school for politeness, but it should seem to be so.*"

"What do you mean?"

"Formerly you used so often to oppose me; and now you not only recommend this journey, which you know will give me pleasure, but you even accompany us yourself."

"Why, what would you have me do?" said John, in a tone of gaiety, which, however, appeared a little constrained. "A proposal for a journey comes very opportunely to one whose heart has received such a wound: don't you remember that I had a refusal?"

"Oh! I had quite forgotten that."

and that not only in the afternoon, but also every morning for an hour or two, on account of her music and singing lessons, from which she derived all the benefit that might have been expected from her deep feeling for music and eager desire to learn.

But notwithstanding all this, and delightful as it was to play and to sing, to read and to discuss what had been read (for the old lady appeared desirous to advance Blenda's education in every possible respect);—notwithstanding all this, nothing was heard of the Count. The old lady never mentioned him, and every evening it was only the watchman who escorted her home.

When the heart is thus filled with vain longing, even pleasure loses its charm, and Blenda at length perceived that she was wrong to cherish any further hopes.

She was now in the way of acquiring the talents and accomplishments which were necessary to enable her to fill the situation of a governess should she find it necessary to seek it, of forming her judgment by means of a useful course of reading, of becoming in short, another "Eliza, or the Perfect Woman" (some romantic association could not be dispensed with) But although she was in progress towards so much that was good, she nevertheless shed many bitter tears in secret, for it seemed to her now that her noble lover was more cruel than Leicester, who would surely not have let Amy Robsart wait so long for him, and that the patience of an angel might well fail under such a trial.

Blenda had forgotten that the interval between her first and second meeting with him had been much longer.

At length the star of our heroine once more shone forth, and sent her one ray of light which was, however, sufficient to prove to her that she had been wrong in believing herself to be altogether forsaken.

One evening that she was going home as usual from Mrs. Gyllenhake's, she had reached the end of Widow-street, and was about to cross the Pack-market, when some one who appeared to have been on the watch for her coming, cautiously approached; and of course, in genuine romance-fashion, he was provided with a dark cloak, whose ample folds completely concealed his figure.

"Ah! here is an event at last!" Blenda was on the point of exclaiming. "It is *he*, that is certain. He looks around—oh, I understand, he wishes to let the watchman with the lantern go by. Oh! how my heart beats; I should have recognised him by that alone."

The mysterious stranger did in fact appear to have waited to let the watchman pass, for no sooner was he gone by than the dark figure approached Blenda, and offered her his arm, though without speaking. She took it at once, merely saying in a low tone—

"How long it is since I have seen you!"

"Angel! had I had the slightest idea that my sufferings had at length touched your heart, long, long ago you would have seen me at your feet. I was far indeed from even

CHAPTER XXV.

AN ADVENTURE.

THREE weeks had elapsed.

Blenda had gone every day to the old lady,

dreaming of such unexpected happiness. But I was unable longer to restrain my longing to see you. I have sought you everywhere, and only this evening have I succeeded in discovering any trace of you."

Blenda was at first silent with astonishment and consternation, then she thrust aside with disgust the man whose arm she had voluntarily taken, and in whom she now recognised—the Chamberlain.

"Leave me—leave me this moment, I insist upon it. It is a shameful thing thus to lie in wait for a poor girl. . . . Besides, do you not see that I am protected?"

"But, my dearest young lady, why make so many difficulties now, when you have just given me so delightful a proof of your real feelings?"

"Good Heavens, how presuming you are!"

"How?"

"I know you are merely pretending to believe that I had recognised you. Your conduct is abominable."

"My conduct shall be anything you please to call it, provided you will only be a little more just. If you are so ready to take the arm of one who offers it, you cannot be surprised that another should hope for the same success."

"Watchman," cried Blenda in a choking voice, "hold up your lantern to this gentleman's face, that his shameless conduct may be exposed. Oh, that my strength did but equal my courage!—for do not imagine that I am afraid of you."

She paused, for a flood of womanish tears was on the point of quenching the vaunted courage which had been called forth by her indignation.

At that moment, however, the watchman returned, and not alone; other footsteps were also heard approaching, and no reader of romance will for a moment doubt that Blenda had the happiness of owing her deliverance to her knight.

When this individual appeared so unexpectedly on the scene, the Chamberlain, who was no friend to disturbances or scenes of any kind, immediately stepped aside a pace or two, in order that he might be able to withdraw without being recognised.

Blenda's knight, however, laid a powerful grasp upon his arm, led him aside, and said to him in a tone of indignant excitement,—

"I would have you take care, Sir, how you again venture to follow this young lady, if you set any value on your personal appearance; for this I solemnly promise you, that if I ever again find you bent on a similar purpose, I will brand you in such a manner that your best friend will find it hard to recognise you!"

"Oho!" replied the Chamberlain, who desired to be as unknown as the interlocutor who addressed him so boldly: "Oho! you assume the tone of a favoured lover! So it was *you* that the little girl expected when she took my arm by mistake! I was sure that the little witch. . . ."

"Silence, Sir! Mademoiselle von Kühlen is

my cousin; and now I hope you will perceive that I have a *right* to come forward as her protector."

"Most assuredly! I give way at once before claims so unquestionable, and have only to add my wishes that your relationship may free you as easily from all the other rivals whom you will assuredly find in future, if you have them not already."

"Confounded puppy!" was the exclamation muttered between his teeth by him who, in accordance with Blenda's own permission, had thus for the second time proclaimed himself her cousin, as he hastened back to our heroine, who had waited for him without moving.

"Oh, how fortunate it was that you came! how well it was timed!" exclaimed she in a tone which betrayed all the delight which she really felt.

And she took his arm—this time it was the right one—without further ceremony.

"Yes, indeed, it was fortunate," said the Count, as they walked on; "but, good heavens! how you tremble."

"Yes, so I do *now*; . . . but, Cousin, did you not hear that I spoke bravely?"

"I did, indeed, follow you closely enough to overhear a few words."

"Well, and did they please you?"

"They did, undoubtedly; but I know something that would have pleased me better."

"What?"

"You will not be angry if I tell you?"

"Certainly not."

"Are you quite sure?"

"Quite. Pray say whatever you like."

"Well, then, I should have been better pleased if my little cousin had been a trifle more cautious. When you took that man's arm he could hardly help supposing that you had recognised him."

"But I thought—I believed—Cousin John, do you not understand what I thought?" asked Blenda, in a tone which betrayed a shade of vexation.

"Yes, perfectly."

"Well then—?"

"How could you suppose that I should be so wanting in delicacy, or rather that I should be so impertinent, as to present myself without speaking! Moreover, I am not vain enough to suppose that *sympathy* can supply the place of daylight, and what has just occurred proves that if I had ventured to do so my vanity would have been sorely punished."

These last words were uttered in a tone which revealed a lover's mortification that another person should have been mistaken for him, although only for a few moments; and this Blenda perceived, but it did not make amends to her for the misfortune of having displeased her protector,—and yet his displeasure made her so happy! She was silent.

"I have offended you by my candour. I was sure I should!"

"No, no; by no means. I am only sorry that you should have cause to blame me. I ought not to have been thinking at all of . . . of my cousin John."

"I am very far from finding fault with that,"

replied he, in a tone of satisfaction; "but only with the fact that . . ."

"That what?"

"That you did not know him better!"

"And yet I assure you this is in some degree excusable."

The lover merely replied with a doubtful "Hem!"

"Only listen. I was just saying to myself: I remember that Cousin John said,—'We cannot meet again for some weeks;' but now some weeks have elapsed, so perhaps he may come after to-morrow, or even to-morrow, or possibly even this evening; and I don't know whither my thoughts would have led me on, but at that very moment, as if in answer to them, there stood before me a tall figure, offering me its arm. Do you still think me so unpardonable if, in the excitement and confusion of the moment, I forgot that one may be mistaken in the arm even of a cousin?"

"No, indeed! After hearing such a defence, I must retract my accusation."

"I am glad of that;—but you were going to say something more."

"I was going to say that, to prevent any further mistake, I shall in future—that is, if my cousin will give me leave—not merely watch over her at a distance, but have the honour of escorting her home myself."

"Are you in earnest?"

"Can you doubt it? This occurrence has been too disagreeable for me to run any risk of its occurring again."

"But, Cousin John, do you know what your words would lead me to suspect?"

"What?"

"That you have already followed me on other evenings. Is that really the case? Answer me candidly."

"I confess that I have occasionally done so, for I was always afraid that you might meet with some little adventure."

"Yet, although you were so near, you would never come and talk to me.—Why was that?"

"Because I did not wish to give other people occasion to talk."

"But will they not do so now?" asked Blenda, her cheeks flushing so deeply as to be visible even through the darkness of the December evening.

Cousin John's answer was, as had happened now and then before, an evasive one.

"I must speak to Mrs. Gyllenhake; and beg her to change her hours after Christmas; so that you may only go to her in the morning during the winter."

"But until Christmas?" interposed Blenda: "there are five days yet till then . . ."

"For those few evenings your Cousin will, as he said, have the honour of accompanying you. A relation, of course, ought to have the privilege of offering his escort without any one finding cause of objection Apropos, have you yet seen your relation, the hat-dresser?"

"No; but I have found it very difficult to avoid him."

"And why should you avoid him?"

"Why?—do you ask why?"

"Yes. I should like to know the reason, if you do not mind telling me."

"Have I not already told you?" said she, with an indescribable expression of annoyance . . . "Besides, I have quite a dislike to the idea of him, for he was the cause of the most painful feeling I have ever experienced: namely, that my poor aunt, of whom I was so fond, had ceased to love me when she was taken from us . . . And there is another reason also: Cousin John was deeply attached to her: he was acquainted with her most anxious wish, and therefore he might be desirous that it should be fulfilled."

"Notwithstanding all this, I think it would be but justice, both to him and to yourself, that you should make his acquaintance. For since you have never seen him, you cannot possibly tell what impression he might produce upon you."

"No, never!" cried Blenda, with some vehemence; for she was hurt by the Count's singular jest, or method of putting her to the test, for she knew not in which light to consider his words. "Never could I feel anything for him but indifference . . . Besides," continued she, in the same excited manner, "I should not think of marrying a mere tradesman."

The tone in which she pronounced the last word caused Cousin John to look up quickly.

"So Cousin Blenda still retains her romantic ideas. I believed she was already cured of them."

"Is there anything romantic in my being unable to love a tradesman?"

"Are you quite sure of your inability?—or, to speak more properly, are you quite sure that your instinct would not fail to enlighten you, if by any accident your choice should fall upon one of that class?"

"By accident? Do you suppose, then, that I could take an interest in any one without knowing who he was?"

"My dear young lady, you astonish me beyond measure."

"How so?"

"I had hoped that you would have recollected, at least with a feeling of good-will, the friend whom you gained at Wenersborg; and now you are pleased to inform me that you have not even the slightest regard for me."

"For you? Do not I know who you are?" cried Blenda, bursting into a hearty fit of laughter.

"Certainly not, so far as I am aware."

"I do, nevertheless. You flatter yourself you have maintained the strictest incognito; and yet,—only think!—before I had exchanged a word with you at Wenersborg, I knew who you were."

"Really?"

"Really."

"Nevertheless, I must take the liberty of doubting the correctness of your information. But pray satisfy my curiosity, by telling me for whom you take me? It is quite necessary that I should be informed of this."

"Excuse me, Cousin, it is not at all necessary; and I have no intention of gratifying your curiosity any more than you have thought it necessary all this while to gratify mine. You are Cousin John to me, and I am Cousin Blenda to you; and so the matter is settled."

"Until we agree upon a new arrangement—is it not so?"

"Certainly."

"And, meanwhile, promise to believe me, when I assure you, upon my honour, that you most certainly do *not* know the name of him whom you have permitted, by his conduct, to obtain your favour."

"What did you say, Cousin John? my favour!—no, I have given you no such permission."

"I used a wrong word; I meant to say your friendship, and you will always find in me a respectful friend. Believe me, it makes me so happy to have the privilege of protecting you, and being of service to you, that I would not risk this degree of happiness for the chance of obtaining a greater one, of which I were not perfectly assured."

"Here we are at home," said Blenda, as she withdrew her arm from his; her mind was now completely set at rest. "Good night to you, Cousin, and many thanks for your care of me."

"Good-bye till to-morrow," returned the young man, bowing, but not even permitting himself the freedom of offering his hand.

"Till to-morrow," replied Blenda, and they parted.

* * * * *

"How delightful to be able to tell him that I knew who he was, and in such a natural manner. He may think what he pleases; but oh! my Lord Count, it was being a little too presumptuous to think that I should fall in love with a man whose name and station were unknown to me. No, no, I am not so romantic as to be satisfied with *deeds alone* . . . but now let me consider what these deeds have been."

And as Blenda followed the watchman and his lantern up the long staircase to her own abode, she hastily summed up the account of her knight's merits.

"In the first place, he fell in love with me; that was involuntary, and therefore not deserving of mention. Secondly, he had the ingenuity to find a favourable opportunity of exciting my interest; that was an action prompted by instinct, so it had no great merit either. Nevertheless, I am grateful to him for it, for without it this little romance would have had no existence . . . But we will now only consider his really meritorious actions.

"In the first place, he gave me good advice instead of feeding my vanity with flattery and nonsense, like the rest.

"Secondly, he gave me such books as showed that he wished, in a delicate manner, to enlighten my deplorable ignorance.

"Thirdly, he commended me to the protection of the Captain, without which I should have been very ill off."

"Fourthly, when we met again, he kept himself in the back-ground, because he was too young to be able with propriety to assist us in

our poverty, and made use in his stead of the excellent old woman who does all in her power to convert me into a sensible and estimable woman.

"Fifthly, he procured me instruction in such a manner that I need never know to whom I am indebted for it.

"Sixthly, he never shows himself (which is very tiresome, but very wise), in order not to expose me to unpleasant remarks.

"Lastly, he follows me at a distance, in order to be at hand in case anything should happen, as was the case this evening."

Here Blenda, absorbed in her reckoning, nearly tumbled over the threshold of her own door.

"It is enough," said she; "these seven good actions justly entitle him to be looked upon in the light of a really estimable man; but he is wrong in supposing that they would have entitled him to assume the tone which he has adopted, if I had not previously been aware of his identity."

And, perfectly satisfied with the result of her reflections, she hastened to enter her own apartment.

CHAPTER XXVI.

ANOTHER VISITOR.

Two days before Christmas, a well-dressed young gentleman was seen walking along Knight-street.

His progress, however, was slow, for he stopped at every house, to enquire for somebody. In one place it was a shoemaker, in another a painter, in a third he was persuaded that he had at length found the cabinet-maker to whom he wanted to speak. But at length he had scrutinized almost every dwelling, and opened almost every door in the street, without finding that which he sought.

"How vexatious it is not to know the number!" muttered he, "and to venture not to ask a direct question. But I must be cautious; some other dragon might be lying in wait, and might take the alarm. I must come upon them by surprise, that I may not be refused admittance."

The house inhabited by Madame von Kühlen and her daughter was near the end of the street; and having got thus far, the young gentleman directed his steps towards it, and began his enquiries on the ground-floor.

"I beg pardon. I hope I am not again mistaken—but I have been told that Runström the turner lives here."

"No; not here."

"On the first floor perhaps?"

"No, that is inhabited by a merchant."

"Oh, then on the second floor—I was sure it must be here."

"No, there is no turner there."

"Are you quite sure?"

"Who should know that better than I, who do the washing and charring for the huckster who lodges there?"

"Well, then I shall have to climb up three pair of stairs?"

"That you can do if you please, since you seem bent upon it; but you will only find two widows, each in a small separate apartment."

"Oho! two widows;" said the stranger to himself, his countenance brightening; and no sooner was the door closed, than he ran up the three pair of stairs as quickly as if he expected every minute to be stopped.

"After having failed with so many widows," thought he, "I wonder whether I shall find the right one at last;" and he knocked loudly.

* * * * *

Within the closed doors sat Madame von Kühlen, gazing with maternal anxiety on her daughter, whose cheek burned with a feverish glow, although she was up, and busied with various trifling occupations.

"You must not be self-willed about it, my child," said she.

"Oh, Mother!"

"Instead of going to good old Mrs. Gyllenhake, you must let me send for the doctor."

"But," broke in Blenda, with a touch of the impatience which occasionally came over her, "that is unbearable; I have not been able to go for three days on account of this fever, which is nothing but a trifle, after all."

"It certainly is very vexatious, my child, but you must have patience."

Blenda was silent, and looked at herself in the glass.

"I think it was not merely the fright that evening, and the revulsion of pleasure that followed upon it, which affected your nerves, but that you have caught a serious cold, by going out in your thin cloak."

"Oh no, Mamma."

"But I say, oh yes! and now you see the consequence of your wilfulness, in insisting on applying the money to our household expenses; which was quite unnecessary, now that Patrick is so kind as to take our rent upon himself."

"But, dear Mamma, it was absolutely necessary that we should have food to eat. . . You must confess that, and also that you have been much better since we have had better food."

"My poor dear child! You are always concerned about me!"

"Oh no, not always," replied Blenda, blushing; "just now for instance, I am concerned only about myself."

"Well, that is no more than fair."

"Oh! Mother, what will he say? what will he think? what will he not have reason to think? since I do not come—now that he has himself offered to escort me home. May he not look upon this as a sign of most unwarrantable mistrust on my part!"

"No, dear child, he cannot do that; and besides, we will send word to Mrs. Gyllenhake how the matter stands."

"It would have been better if we had done so yesterday; it would have been no more than civil!"

"Well, did I not tell you so? but you put it off from hour to hour in hopes of being better and able to go yourself, until it was too late."

"Yes, yes, I was a goose; but I am much better to-day, and I assure you, if you will only let me go out, the fresh air will quite set me to rights again."

Madame von Kühlen shook her head doubtfully.

"Hush!" cried Blenda with a sudden start,—*"Hush, there is a ring at the door-bell! Oh, think if he should be uneasy about me;—if he should have come himself!"*

And, the flush deepening on her cheeks, Blenda sat down on the sofa, having first convinced herself by a glance round the room, that its neatness was unexceptionable, that it even looked smart with the new curtains put up for Christmas.

Madame von Kühlen was always a pattern of tidiness; but to-day, stimulated by a secret hope coinciding with that just expressed by Blenda, she had done wonders with their one room.

It would be useless to endeavour to describe Blenda's feelings when the footstep of a man was heard in the entrance. At the same moment the charwoman, who came every morning, and was not yet gone home, made her appearance, and informed the ladies that a gentleman who announced himself as an acquaintance, asked leave to pay them a visit.

"Is he young and distinguished looking?" asked Madame von Kühlen in a low voice.

"Is he dark and handsome?" whispered Blenda.

The charwoman nodded.

"Beg him to walk in. I know who it is!" said Madame von Kühlen, as she rose with trembling alacrity to receive her future son-in-law.

"For Heaven's sake, child," exclaimed she as the servant closed the door, "come to yourself, and in this most important crisis of your life conduct yourself as becomes a woman whose fate is about to be linked with that of a man of character as noble as his birth. Doubtless he now intends to speak. Thank Heaven that I was led by a kind of presentiment to put on my new bombazine gown."

At that moment the door was opened by the charwoman with great ceremony. And there indeed stood a young man with an elegant figure, expressive features, and eyes which kindled as they rested upon Blenda; for never had she looked more lovely than at that moment, when, unable to look up, she waited in blushing confusion for the first words of her lover.

"Good Gracious! what does this mean?" cried Madame von Kühlen, with a consternation which she made no attempt to conceal.

"Here is—yes, this is Baron T—sward of the steamboat."

"Baron T—sward of East Gothland, by your leave—that being rather more explicit. Yes, I am he, who last summer was compelled in a somewhat singular manner, if I may be permitted to say so, to break off our very agreeable acquaintance; but who now, having returned to Stockholm a few days ago, have used my utmost endeavours to discover you, in order to offer my poor services in case you might by any chance stand in need of them."

On recognising the Baron's voice, uneasiness and disappointment combined to convert the roses on Blenda's cheeks into lilies. What did this man want! Alas! Blenda had no longer her good aunt in whom to trust.

The manner in which she returned the unembarrassed and courteous greeting of the Baron could only be compared for coldness to the look which accompanied it.

The Baron perceived this sudden change with astonishment. It was but too obvious that she must have expected some one else. He was amazed to find the artless joyous little maiden of the steamboat converted into a marble statue; but into a statue so beautiful that her former charms sank into nothing in his eyes.

Madame von Kühlen's patriarchal habits were so ingrained that she could not force herself to so great a want of hospitality as not to ask the Baron to take a seat; but the tone in which she did it was one of constraint, and she hastened to prove to him how uncalled for was this visit, by adding,—

"Thank God! we stand in no further need of the assistance of strangers; and, indeed, if I am not mistaken, something of the sort was expressed in the answer my sister sent to the little note you wrote me."

"Very true. But had I not been summoned home immediately afterwards, by the news of my father's sudden illness, I should certainly have had the pleasure of calling upon the excellent old lady in person. For her manner of expressing herself, although it implied some degree of unmerited suspicion, revealed so much firmness and uprightness of character that I should have been very glad of the opportunity of pleading my own cause. But have I been correctly informed that you have lost your kind relation?"

"Yes, this excellent friend has been taken from us; but, as I said just now, she did not leave us altogether to our fate."

"I am delighted to hear it."

"And my nephew Patrick, the linendraper, a man of wealth and consideration here in Stockholm, does all he can to be of service to us, so that he is quite my right-hand."

"That is but natural, and as he fulfils his duties as a relation so admirably, I shall certainly not presume to place myself in competition with him. I was, however, not aware of this, but on the contrary had heard," and as he spoke the Baron frequently directed an enquiring glance towards Blenda, "that you and your daughter, having lost

your protectress, had been obliged to leave your former dwelling, and that you had been laid up with a severe attack of fever; and on hearing this, my only thought was, that by appealing to the friendly nature of our former acquaintance, I might venture to enquire whether I could be of any service to you."

This explanation was delivered with such frank simplicity, that our tender-hearted Madame von Kühlen was as usual quite softened and won over.

"Thank Heaven," thought she, "people always turn out better than one expects. My sister, God bless her, was often too severe in her judgment."

"When one has himself experienced a great loss," continued the young Baron, "one feels double sympathy for the sorrows of others. Since I saw you I have lost my father, and I am now quite alone in the world."

"Indeed! I am grieved to hear it," exclaimed Blenda, who, pleased by the delicacy of the Baron in not addressing himself directly to her, could not withhold this expression of her feelings.

"A thousand thanks for your kind sympathy. My father died immediately on my return home, and the succession to a large entailed estate is no compensation for such a loss, for he was the kindest of parents. Four months have, however, passed since then, and now I am come to Stockholm to seek some diversion to my thoughts."

"But your mother, Baron?"

"My dear young lady, should I be alone in the world if I had a mother? I never had the happiness of receiving her caresses, for she died when I was yet an infant."

They were interrupted by another ring at the door-bell.

A thrill passed through both mother and daughter, and their excitement was such as to attract the attention of their visitor, who felt himself more and more amazed and perplexed.

This time, however, it was only a young servant girl whom the charwoman admitted, namely, Mrs. Gyllenhake's little maid, who came to enquire the cause of Mademoiselle von Kühlen's absence.

Her mother hastened to anticipate Blenda's reply. "The cause, my good girl, is that my daughter was ill both yesterday and the day before, and is still so weak that I dare not allow her to go out."

"Good Heavens! is Mademoiselle von Kühlen unwell?" exclaimed the Baron, rising, "I beg your pardon, I am in despair that my visit should be so ill-timed."

With these words he took up his hat, but made no further movement, for he perceived that his courteous speech had been unheard.

"Mother, do let me go. I am quite well now," whispered Blenda with eager anxiety.

"Impossible, my child, quite impossible," replied Madame von Kühlen, also, as she thought, in a whisper; "a little anxiety will

do him no harm, while you would certainly be the worse for exposure to the night air."

So the little servant maid was dismissed with an excuse to Mrs. Gyllenhake.

Blenda, scarcely able to restrain her tears, leaned her head upon her hand. The Baron still remained standing. He had heard everything, and his hopes, which a moment before had been rapidly rising, now sank as rapidly, and the cause was unfortunately but too obvious.

Madame von Kühlen stammered out an explanation of her daughter's engagement to Mrs. Gyllenhake. Blenda did not even look up.

But this very indifference on her part made him all the more anxious to attract her attention. There could hardly be a doubt that a favoured rival was here concerned, and the little adventure which he had sought solely with a view to his amusement—for up to this moment he had had no further object than to enjoy the society of this fascinating little mixture of a finished coquette and a child so artless as not to appear even to understand what flirtation meant—the adventure, I say, assumed quite another character when a feeling of jealousy began to be infused into it.

On board the steamer the Baron had been jealous of nobody, he had merely joined the other gentlemen in paying court to her; but to his own astonishment, after their separation, the fascinating image of Blenda would not vanish from his mind, but retained its pre-eminence over all the others with which he sought to compare it; and constantly did the journey on board the steamer recur to his mind, and as constantly was it followed by the vexatious recollection of Mrs. Thorman's dismissal—a recollection which would probably have led to some further results, had it not been for his sudden departure from the capital.

When he saw her again, however,—and the prospect of this meeting had occupied his thoughts during the whole of his journey back to Stockholm—Blenda was grown older by half a year, and it appeared to him that an indescribable improvement had taken place in her, while her present indifference rendered her yet more *piquante*. Lastly, jealousy, or at least envy, came to lend its aid; in short, here were all the ingredients of a serious attachment, either to be developed or crushed, according as circumstances might prove favourable or the reverse.

"Perhaps I am only in your way now," said the young Baron, with a side glance at the sofa, "but I hope I may be permitted to repeat my visit another day; it would give me great pain were you to refuse me this."

"I should be very sorry to give pain to any one, be he whom he may; but to tell the truth, Baron . . ."

"What?"

"I think you must perceive that it would not be proper for two lone women to receive

the visits of a young gentleman. My daughter's only possession is her good name, and we must be very strict."

"But, my dear Madame von Kühlen, is it possible that the veriest prude could see anything to object to in a lady of your age receiving the visits of an acquaintance? Surely that can offend neither against custom nor propriety."

"If my lamented sister were still living, she would answer you far better than I can do. All I can say is—Pray do not come to us; for the trifling pleasure which you might possibly find in the society of two poor women might cost us dear, and I am sure you are too honourable to desire that."

The Baron felt the colour rise to his cheeks; he was touched, and he took his leave with a resolution never to return.

But Blenda's last glance, her sweet smile when she perceived that he was about to obey her mother's injunction, branded itself upon his heart, and even while he said to himself, "Poor creatures!—I must be a villain indeed if such a request were unheeded—I will leave them in peace!"—even while he said this, his thoughts were occupied only with the possibility of again beholding this bewitching young creature.

Two hours after the Baron's departure, the Doctor made his appearance, unsummoned, in Madame von Kühlen's apartment.

He had been informed, he said, by a friend, that his presence was required; but after he had given some trifling prescription he declared that all that was necessary for the young lady's recovery was that she should stay at home for a couple of days.

"Yes, that is all very well," said Blenda, when he was gone, "but now Christmas time will have passed away, and I shall not once . . . Do not people ever die of despair?"

"My child, you are too impetuous! My respected grandmother, who had seen the world, used to say . . ."

"Mother!" exclaimed Blenda, with the pettish impatience of a spoiled child, "if I do not die of despair, I shall certainly die of weariness, if I am forced to listen to everything that your respected grandmother used to say."

"Upon my word, child! I am sure if my respected grandmother were alive, and could see you behave like that, she would be very much astonished indeed."

CHAPTER XXVII.

A JOURNEY.

"WELL, my dear, are we ready at last?" cried Patrick, as he followed his wife from one room to another, to hurry her.

"My dear Patrick, you never understand anything."

"If you have told me that once, you have told it me a thousand times, my love."

"And I shall have to tell it you a thousand more. I have no end of things to think of at the last moment—for instance, this supply to your aunt—do you think such things can arrange themselves? I have had to undo all my own arrangements to do your pleasure in this matter."

"How good you are, my little Henrietta, for those who know how to deal with you!" and Patrick bestowed a look of delighted affection upon his wife.

"Bless us! I really believe he is going to make pretty speeches to his wife!"

"No, I am only speaking the truth! I expected you to make all sorts of objections to the suggestions about my aunt—but, to-day and yesterday you have been a positive angel."

Henrietta smiled sweetly. "Well, it is no more than my duty, to act according to your wishes."

"That is very true, but you used not to think so very much about it. What I like is your present system. And it was only yesterday that I said to John: Do you know, John, I am—what do you guess?"

"Oh! I have no time for guessing!"

"Very true."

"Still I should perhaps like to know..."

"What I said to John? There it is—women are always curious! Well, all I said to John was this: that I was the happiest man in all Stockholm—and that nobody had so good a little wife as I."

"That is very kind of you, my dear, very kind.... But what can John be about, that he does not make his appearance? He will surely not throw us over at the last moment?"

"Oh dear no! he has sent all these things here, the carriage is packed, and we are to call for him as we go by; so you see we are only waiting for you—and when you reflect that it would be very unpleasant to arrive late, to-morrow being Christmas Eve, I am sure you will hurry yourself a little."

"But I am quite ready—I thought we were waiting for John."

"And here he comes!" cried Patrick, "so you can no longer make an excuse of him."

"Good morning to you both! Have your clocks stopped, or did you not mean to set out before mid-day?" Such was John's greeting.

Scarcely had Henrietta looked at her brother-in-law, before she exclaimed,—

"Mercy! how impatient you look, my dear John. Really there is a severer comment on my little dilatoriness in your face, than in all Patrick's exclamations and reproaches."

"Those who are accustomed to travelling, my little sister-in-law, are also accustomed to punctuality. The horses have been put to above an hour and a half."

"And I suppose you have been waiting all the time, pacing up and down your room in that fur cloak."

"Oh no, I am not so utterly inexperienced in the punctuality of a lady, as to suppose

we should start within an hour of the time appointed. But when I saw another hour slipping away, I thought it time to come hither and read you a little lecture upon Christian charity."

"When you are married, brother," said Patrick, "you will learn not to trust either to your wife's charity, or to her recollection of the clock. If I had not begun to hurry Henrietta three hours before the time, she would not have got her bonnet on yet—but look what a neat pretty little bonnet it is. I never saw that before—do you mean to wear it on the journey?"

"To be sure—in a close carriage one can wear anything; and besides, I did not wish to take more than one trunk with me, as I know you hate a quantity of luggage."

"There, John! do you hear! get yourself such another wife as that, if you can find her—and does not she look nice in her little bonnet?"

John, who had been looking out of the window, now turned round, put up his eye-glass, and began to examine minutely the dress of his sister-in-law, for that he knew always pleased her.

"Very good, indeed! it must be owned that you understand the art of dressing."

Henrietta coloured with pleasure—and Patrick replied,—"It must be owned, too, that she understands the art of spending money—but of course one must be made to feel that one is married, and a pretty wife is an expensive luxury."

If Henrietta had been alone with her husband she would not have hesitated to remind him that a woman who brought money with her had a perfect right to spend it: as it was, she said instead, with a graceful curtsy,—

"Now, Messieurs, I am ready, and have not taken more than ten minutes to dress."

In another ten minutes the party were in the carriage, and the journey was begun.

They had not got further than Jerfwa,* however, before Patrick began to complain of the bore of being packed inside a coach; "especially," continued he, on receiving no answer, "as neither of you seem to be more than half alive,"—and his sleepy glance wandered reproachfully from his brother to his wife, who sat opposite to him.

"I am thinking of a failure of which I am expecting to hear shortly, and which will injure me a good deal," said John.

"And I," said Henrietta, "am tired with all my domestic exertions before setting out."

"But that being the case, the time is likely to hang very heavy upon my hands, as I am neither tired, nor have anything to think about, but must just sit still and hold my tongue. Hang me! if I would let a misfortune weigh upon my mind before it has come to pass, for then I might perhaps have all my worry for nothing; and, after it has happened, dwelling upon it can do no good. I try to remedy it as well as I can."

"You are very fortunate to have so many

* A village half a Swedish mile from Stockholm.

resources in yourself," replied John abruptly; and then shut his eyes to think of the failure—or of something else.

"And I may not even smoke a cigar!" Poor Patrick turned his cigar-case impatiently in his hand.

"Of course, if you wish to stifle me, you are the master!" replied Henrietta, in the tone of a prima donna about to fall into a swoon at the end of the third act.

"Why, what the devil is amiss now! Your shoes cannot pinch you, since you have got on clogs. But one thing is certain, that ever since we got into the carriage, you have been quite unlike yourself!"

"You think so!"

"And I tell you what, my good friends, you are both very disagreeable; so I shall get out and ride upon the box, that I may be able to enjoy the fresh air, and the company of my cigar."

In a few minutes Patrick was seated beside the coachman, puffing away clouds of exhilarating smoke to his heart's content; and began to talk to the driver, without troubling his head further about the cause of the change in Henrietta's mood.

* * * *

Silence continued to reign inside the carriage, and would probably have oppressed Henrietta to suffocation even sooner than Patrick's cigar, if she had not suddenly burst into a fit of crying.

"What, in the name of Goodness, is the matter?" asked John, rousing himself from his own reflections to gaze in astonishment at his excited companion. "Are you ill? have you forgotten anything? or . . ."

"Be so kind as to spare yourself the trouble of thinking at all about so insignificant a person as I am. I make no claim upon your attention."

"What! are we again at variance?"

"At variance? Really I do not know whether we have ever been friends."

"And really I do not feel sure of it either. But I sincerely wish that we were; for it is not so very agreeable to be made the scape-goat of your ill-humour, without any fault of my own."

"Oh! without any fault of your own!"

"Certainly, to the best of my knowledge."

"Yes; I dare say there are people for whom any treatment is good enough."

"What on earth do you mean?"

"People to whom one is not bound to show even the ordinary courtesy which every woman has a right to expect."

"My dear Henrietta, you really astonish me! Pray tell me what offence I have committed, if you really mean that it is I who am the cause of your tears."

"And you actually ask?" replied Henrietta, in a scornful tone.

"Yes; and I am waiting patiently for your answer—if you please to give me one."

"But I do not please to answer. You may treat me as uncivilly as you like; but you cannot compel me to speak, when I am determined to be silent."

She took off her pretty bonnet, threw it

carelessly on the back seat, tied a silk handkerchief over her head, and settled herself in the corner of the carriage.

If Henrietta had meant to produce a great effect by this little scene, she must have been sorely disappointed to see John sink back again into his former abstraction. Scarcely a quarter of an hour had passed before he appeared to have completely forgotten that anything had happened, or even that he was not alone, for he sighed deeply several times; and there is no saying how long this might have continued, if Henrietta could have remained passive, —but hers was by no means a passive disposition.

She suddenly started up, tapped at the window, and cried, "Patrick! Patrick!"

Patrick, however, did not hear.

"Do you want anything of Patrick?" asked John, as he stretched out his hand to open the window.

"I merely wanted to ask him whether he was not soon going to give up the coach-box and his cigar to you—both appear to be very agreeable."

"Was that all you had to say to him?"

"Is not that enough?"

"More than enough; for, with your leave, I had rather stay where I am."

"Oh yes! one can sigh and meditate more at one's ease inside a carriage."

"Very true."

"Then one has nothing to disturb one, not even the recollection of having a companion; for who would take any heed of his half-brother's wife?"

"What, have I offended you again?"

"It is quite easy and natural to forget that she has been so silly as to cry over an affront which was doubtless quite unintentional, as her presence was not even noticed!"

"Is it possible, my dear Henrietta, that you could have cried about that?"

No answer.

"And so my offence consisted in having unintentionally failed to entertain you!"

"Oh! I am not so unreasonable as to expect you to entertain me; but . . ."

"But what?"

"From the moment that we left home you have not said one word to me of your own accord—and you could forget immediately that I was depressed and out of spirits."

"But, my dear sister-in-law, I have told you that the offence was involuntary."

"So much the worse!"

"I was so absorbed in my own thoughts as to forget the agreeable company in which I was."

This was worse than all. He would not understand that a *voluntary* omission would have been far more pardonable; and that Henrietta felt this was proved by her reply.

"There is no need for you to dwell so much upon that—it was quite obvious enough—and I would lay my life that the subject of the reflections which prevented your having a thought to bestow upon me was very interesting."

"You really excite my curiosity—and you

will oblige me much by informing me what you think that subject was."

"Upon *one* condition!"

"What is it?"

"That you will tell me the truth."

"That I promise you."

"Were you not thinking of another woman?"

"Oh! is *that* what you suspect?"

The tone in which John spoke could not be said to be altogether unconstrained, and the blush which overspread his countenance made Henrietta start. Her words had been spoken at random, or rather had been uttered merely that they might be contradicted. But now, as it seemed to her, they were confirmed, and the acute pain with which she received this confirmation caused her to turn so deadly pale, that John was really alarmed, and bent over her anxiously.

"Henrietta!"

"Oh, hush! . . . it is nothing. There is nothing to be said . . . the day before yesterday you were so cheerful, you seemed so happy . . . Good Heavens! how could I so deceive myself—and now those sighs . . ."

"I really think you do not know what you are saying—let me open the window, you want fresh air."

"Yes, yes, treat me as coldly, as contemptuously as you will, but do not strive to deny that it was for a woman that you sighed."

"If you speak in that manner, I shall not consider myself obliged to answer you. Besides, I really am not aware whether I sighed or not; but, if I did, surely it is no more than anybody has a right to do."

"Do you not know that not to deny is to confess?"

John was silent.

"Better and better! you are silent; and that is equivalent to an admission that your heart is no longer your own."

"Henrietta!"

"Well, why should you seek to conceal it—is that anything to me? Could you really be vain and presumptuous enough to suppose it?"

"Certainly not, my dear sister-in-law—Heaven forbid that I should be guilty of such a thought; that would indeed be to offer you an affront, compared to which my former offence would be the merest trifle."

"Oh! how bitterly you speak!"

"That was very far from my intention . . . but now, since you insist upon knowing the truth . . ."

"Go on."

"I will acknowledge that I *was* thinking of a woman."

"Ha!"

"Of a lady with whom I became acquainted on my journey."

"On your journey?" repeated Henrietta, drawing a longer breath, and feeling in some sort relieved. "Forgive me . . . I thought . . . I imagined—that you had been thoughtless enough to lose your heart here in Stockholm, so soon after the death of our excellent mother."

"If so deep an impression as you seem to take for granted were really made upon me, it

was, at least, done long before my mother's death . . . but a poor traveller has little time to dwell upon such impressions."

"Then it is, perhaps, in a fair way of being effaced?"

"You are becoming rather too minute in your examination, so that I must absolve myself from the necessity of answering any further questions—without disparagement, however, to my gratitude for your friendly interest."

"Oh! do not be uneasy; I have no intention of wearying you any more."

* * * * *

At that moment the carriage stopped, and Patrick opened the door and announced that they had reached Barkatz.*

"I am so hungry," said he, "that I think I could eat up half a ham and a whole basketful of eggs. I hope they will have plenty of provisions on the day before Christmas Eve. . . . Would you like some warm milk and biscuit, my love?"

"Oh, do let me alone! I do not want either milk or biscuit—"

"Why, the deuce is in it! matters seem to be even worse than when I left you. John, what have you been doing to Henrietta?"

"I have got into disgrace, and I must own that it is not altogether unmerited."

"How?"

"I did not make myself agreeable to my little sister-in-law, as I was in duty bound to do."

"That comes of your stupid reflections; hang that bankruptcy, that seems to spoil all the pleasure of our journey!"

"Well, but do let us go in," said Henrietta.

"To be sure, my love, and afterwards I will stay with you and amuse you. I have been hearing some capital stories from the driver; and I will tell them to you."

"Mercy! what a prospect!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

CHRISTMAS EVE.

The festive preparations in Madame von Kühlen's large and pretty room showed plainly that it was Christmas Eve, for the abundant gifts despatched by Patrick enabled her to make her arrangements in a style of very unusual luxury.

It was about seven o'clock in the evening, and as the charwoman had been engaged for the whole day, it was not necessary for the good woman to stay in the kitchen to stir the rice porridge herself.

Four tall wax candles, in well-polished candlesticks, burned on the table, for, said Madame von Kühlen, "as they were given us, we may as well light them." And upon

* The first post-station on the way from Stockholm to Weteras, one and a half Swedish miles from Stockholm.

the same principle she decked her tea-table with an abundance that would have served as well for five people as for two.

But if Madame von Kühlen could rejoice over the candles, the tea-table, the pile of cakes, and especially the rice-porridge, which surpassed all that they had ever dreamed of in the country, Blenda had, besides all these, her own particular source of pleasure.

In order to comprehend this, however, we must revert to the time when the Doctor's desire that she would keep her room for a few days disappointed and distressed her so much that she refused to be comforted even by the wise sayings of her respected great-grand-mother.

Madame von Kühlen, kind, and all too weak as she was, was at first, indeed, a little offended, but could not endure the sight of her daughter's depression more than a few hours before she said to her,—

"Is there nothing, my sweet pet, which could give you a little pleasure?"

Blenda looked up with a most disconsolate expression of countenance.

"Just think, my darling, if there is anything; be sure you shall have it, provided it is by any means possible."

Blenda let herself be pressed, or rather, entreated, for a long time; she knew of nothing which could make her even the very smallest amends for the great happiness of which her indisposition had deprived her, and the worst of all was, that it might never be offered to her again. At length, however, she said,—

"There is one thing, though, but only one, which would make me very happy."

"Well—thank Heaven for it!—what is it, dear?—tell me."

"But it is so foolish: I must confess that beforehand."

"No matter, if it can but give you pleasure."

"Oh, yes, the greatest."

"Well then, tell me what it is, my pet, that you may enjoy your pleasure the sooner."

"But it will cost so much."

"As we have had nothing to buy for Christmas, we have ten dollars banco still left; and if they are not sufficient, there are my earrings to be pledged."

"There is no occasion for that, dear mother—the money is more than sufficient. But would it not be wrong of me to take it?"

"What can you be thinking of? it is all that you have kept for yourself of the fifty rix-dollars that you have earned. And you may take it without misgiving, since—thanks to Patrick's and Henrietta's kindness, which we shall one day be able amply to repay—we are provided for at least three weeks."

"Very well, dear mother, then we will send out at once for some lawn and some lace; and we will speak to the dressmaker who lives in the house, and I have no doubt she will be so good as to do what I wish."

"Lawn and lace, child!—what peculiar sort of happiness can they afford you?"

Blenda coloured and smiled.

"Do speak, for I cannot understand it at all,—and then I will go to the dressmaker."

"In all the modern novels that I have lately read, I have found mention of—a sort of dress which is worn by ladies of distinction, such as countesses and marchionesses. It is called a *peignoir*, and is a sort of loose wrapping-gown. These *peignoirs* are very full, and light, and richly trimmed—very airy and graceful. For weeks past I have dreamt day and night of one, and I think that such a dress would become me very well. How pretty it must be, with its wide, open sleeves! I am convinced that I should quite get over my disappointment and my illness if I could get one, and wear it to-morrow evening. Oh, it would be so nice, so very nice! and I should fancy that I was already a—"

"Countess!" interposed Madame von Kühlen, gaily. She was no less delighted with the idea than Blenda herself.

"Dear Mamma!"

"Well, my child, I will go this very minute and talk to the dressmaker."

The lawn and the lace, as well as some pink ribands, were bought; and with the assistance of the good-natured dressmaker, who was promised the remainder of the lawn, to make a handkerchief, the incomparable *peignoir* was at last completed.

And now, while Madame von Kühlen was setting out the table for tea, came the great moment when Blenda took her station before the looking-glass, in her airy and elegant costume, and began a careful inspection of the future countess; and to judge by the smile which every now and then parted her lips, and lighted up her lovely face, the said inspection was not altogether unsatisfactory.

"Oh, how nice you look! positively just like Aurora; and your figure looks so delicate and graceful in that dress," exclaimed Madame von Kühlen, as she kept turning round and round her daughter. "Those pink bows are perfectly lovely; and of this I am sure, that anybody who saw you—at least, if they had the slightest knowledge of physiognomy—ought to be able to swear that you were born to be a princess, although you may choose to content yourself with being a countess. And how beautiful those slippers are, with the pearls embroidered upon them! You were very right to keep them for yourself, as people were not ashamed to offer so low a price to the woman who was to sell them for you."

"But do you know, mother, what I think becomes me the best of all?" said the little coquette, as she arranged the folds of her long open *peignoir* over her white petticoat.

"No, my darling . . . but this I know, that if I was not afraid of the rice porridge being ready too soon after ten, and my being therefore unable to eat as much as I meant to do, I could stand here till to-morrow morning, staring at my little countess. But what do you think becomes you best of all?"

"My little lace cap."

"Very true—very true—it is really lovely. What taste you have!"

"I got the pattern at one of the first milliners' establishments, from a cap that was being sent home to the Russian minister's wife."

"Well, I never! a cap like the Russian minister's wife!" and Madame von Kühlen folded her hands with the utmost respect, and could not refrain from even making a little curtsy.

"It is *just* such a cap as this," continued Blenda, "that ladies of rank wear of a morning, or when they lie down to rest a little. And now that I have combed my hair in smooth bands, it does not look so much amiss under the pink ribands. But I will not try your patience any longer; and to own the truth, I almost think,"—and she paused for a moment—"that I over-exerted myself to get my pretty dress ready. Oh, my head!"

"What is the matter?"

"Everything seems to be swimming round—I feel so strange . . . so weak!"

"Do you see, you little goose," exclaimed Madame von Kühlen, becoming instantly alarmed, "that is the consequence of sitting up all night when one is ill. What a vain, foolish mother I was to permit it. Never had the poor woman judged herself so justly."

Blenda made no reply, but supported by her mother's arm, she tottered to the sofa, and sank down upon it, without bestowing a single thought upon the *peignoir*, which was wofully tumbled in consequence.

"I should like to tear that wretched trumpery to pieces, and throw it into the fire; for it is all along of it that you are ten times worse now than you were before!"

Fortunately, however, Madame von Kühlen hit upon a remedy at once less desperate and more efficacious; she thought of the water-jug and the eau-de-cologne bottle; and with their assistance Blenda was soon in some degree restored, and assured her mother with a smile that, although she scarcely thought she would be able to sit up,—which was doubtless to punish her because she should have liked so much to see herself in the glass,—they might yet be very happy and comfortable together.

"Happy and comfortable now! I should think so, indeed!"

"Oh, indeed we may, Mamma. You will talk, and I shall listen."

"If you can but drink some tea, my child, I will try to be content."

"Oh, yes—a little drop. I could not fail to drink tea with you on Christmas Eve."

"Well then, my poor child, shut your eyes, and rest a little, while I go and fetch it. I do not like the charwoman to do it, or else she would have an excuse already cut and dried, if the rice porridge should be burned."

"Very well, dear Mamma."

Blenda made herself comfortable upon the sofa, took her mother's advice, and shut her eyes. If the young Baron could have seen

her now, his noble resolution to shun a certain house in Knight-street would have run great risk of being broken.

It is true that the sofa on which she lay was made of common painted deal, and covered with coarse red and black stuff; but the effect of the soft folds of her white dress was heightened by the dark ground on which it rested, and her small foot, encased in its embroidered slipper, peeped forth from a cloud of delicate lace.

Her whole appearance revealed the elasticity and freshness of youth; but at this particular moment it was seen as through a delicate white veil; for the paleness of Blenda's cheeks, together with the tint of her fair braided hair, exhibited a transparency of colouring which told of the faintness which was struggling for the mastery with the joyous energy of her young life.

A gentle ring at the door-bell failed to reach Blenda's ears; she had fallen into a light slumber, which no presentiment disturbed—nor was she the least conscious of that which was passing in the entrance—namely, that the charwoman, on hastening to open the door, found herself face to face with a gentleman,—who was not only seen but recognised with ecstatic delight by Madame von Kühlen through the crack of the kitchen door,—which gentleman desired her to enquire whether the ladies would admit a relation to pay them a visit.

"Let him in!" whispered Madame von Kühlen, as the charwoman thrust in her head with an enquiring glance, "let him in directly."

But when this was done, Madame von Kühlen made no particular haste with the tea, but, on the contrary, entered into a long whispered dispute with the charwoman, as to whether the water did or did not boil, which at length reached such an height, that for the first time in the course of their acquaintance, our good lady and her assistant were very near becoming seriously angry with each other.

Meanwhile the guest had laid aside his cloak, and entered the room indicated by the charwoman.

As of course the reader has jumped at the conclusion that this was Blenda's Knight, who, being probably uneasy at not seeing her again, according to her promise, had at length determined to call in person upon her and her mother, he will easily conceive that the sight which met his eyes appeared to him to be scarcely one of earth.

Having convinced himself at a glance that no one else was in the room, he advanced noiselessly towards the sofa, holding his breath as if in dread lest the lovely vision should disappear—but it did not; and as he stood beside his sleeping beauty, gazing upon her as if he had never seen her before, vividly as every feature was stamped upon his recollection, a chill shot through his frame, and the bouquet which he had brought with him fell

at her feet. He durst not touch it, but obeying another and an irresistible impulse, sank down on his knees beside the sofa, his gaze still resting upon Blenda with astonishment and delight.

At that moment she awoke.

Either the perfume of the flowers, or the quick breathing of some one beside her, who she felt was not her mother, had dispelled her light slumber, and when she beheld him of whom she had even now been dreaming, in a position of which too she had often dreamed, although not on this occasion, a low cry burst from her lips, so low, however, that it was heard by her knight alone, who, unable at once to resume the footing upon which he had hitherto conversed with her, continued to gaze upon her without speaking.

His silence was very embarrassing to Blenda.

"Is that really you, Cousin John?" asked she at length, "do speak to me!"

He took her hand and pressed it to his lips, and after retaining it a few seconds he replied,—

"I have to entreat your forgiveness—it was my anxiety about you that brought me hither—but the Doctor had assured me that you were better."

"So I am—I am only resting a little."

"But when I came in you looked so pale, so deadly pale, that I really did not know what I was about."

And so saying, he rose and stood beside her, still unable to withdraw his gaze from her.

"Indeed, I am no longer ill—I was only a little faint,—but now I will get up and—"

"No, no, you must not do that . . . Oh, Blenda, it seems to me as if I could never have seen you before—how lovely you are! Your poor Cousin's head will really be turned if you do not help him to recover the balance of his mind."

Blenda, whose head was very nearly turned too, by language so new to her, nevertheless rose at once. His appeal to her for assistance should not be made in vain.

She now perceived the bouquet—and it was doubly welcome to her at that moment, as it afforded her an excuse for resuming the tone in which their intercourse had hitherto been carried on; for notwithstanding the expression of feeling into which the Count had been betrayed, it was evident that it was not his intention as yet to lay aside his incognito, otherwise he would not have spoken of himself as her cousin!

"What! fresh flowers on Christmas day!" exclaimed she, in a tone of delight, caused probably more by the happiness of seeing her mysterious lover for the first time on his knees before her, than by the possession of his second nosegay. "Oh, Cousin John, you certainly understand how to win the gratitude of a young girl . . . I must put them in my hair—I shall take off this cap, which, of course—you understand—I could not wear when you are here, and put them in. Now Cousin, do fetch the looking-glass, and hold

it before me, and I will fasten in the rose-bud and the white elder-flowers together, and see—I almost think the geranium-leaves ought to go with them."

And with a joyous childish grace, which so delighted Cousin John, that he had no further thought or wish for sentimental scenes, Blenda began to arrange her hair before the glass—fastening, unfastening, and arranging the flowers, with as much unembarrassed ease, as if he who obeyed her orders with such ready good will in holding the glass, and turned it now this way and now that, to follow her every motion, had been at least a hundred miles away.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A MERRY CHRISTMAS.

THE dispute in the kitchen had by this time reached its height, and if Madame von Kühlen did not wish to break definitely with her charwoman, there was nothing for it but to acknowledge that the water boiled, and the kettle was ready for tea. And, with a hearty wish that the moment in which she should have to welcome her distinguished son-in-law were well over, the good lady re-entered the room.

But the tea-tray was well nigh deposited on the ground instead of on the table, when the sanguine mother saw the Count, whom she had pictured to herself as surprised in the midst of a most affecting and tender scene, standing with a smiling face, and with the looking-glass in his hands in front of Blenda, who had completely recovered from her faintness, and looked as blooming as the rose-buds with which she was adorning her hair.

The moment was rather an embarrassing one to the visitor, whose demeanour showed that he had quite regained his presence of mind. He at once laid down the looking-glass, and advanced to greet Madame von Kühlen with more politeness, but less formality than she had anticipated, and before she could utter a single word, (although she found time to curtsy repeatedly,) he said in a tone of deep respect,

"I have taken the liberty of causing myself to be announced as a relation; but as I cannot expect my claims to such a title to be taken for granted, I am quite ready to give account of this relationship, if Madame von Kühlen desires it."

"Pray, my dear Sir—excuse me, my dear Nephew—let me beg you to reserve all explanations until it is convenient to you to afford them. Both my daughter and I have too much delicacy of feeling, (and here came a fresh series of curtseys,) to wish, by ill-timed curiosity, to compel a confidence which will not, I am sure, be withheld when the proper time arrives. It is sufficient for me, as a mother, to be assured that your intentions are

honourable, which, indeed, I have never doubted; but which is, if possible, still further confirmed by the honour you do us in seeking us in our own humble abode."

"I am as much gratified as I am surprised to find myself so cordially welcomed, where I confess I had feared to encounter some opposition; and allow me to assure you, my dear Aunt, (you will surely not refuse such a title from a relation,) that I look forward to many a hearty laugh in future when we recall the circumstances of our first meeting."

"Oh! but this is not the first. When we were neighbours at Wenersborg, we once met in the great hall when you were coming home."

"Hem! But I was not lodging in the hotel."

"Indeed! you do not say so."

"No; but I *do* remember meeting you when I went there to visit an acquaintance."

"A very intimate acquaintance, no doubt," replied Madame von Kühlen, with a significant smile, which did not, however, cause her to forget one particle of her dignity.

"Dear Mamma," interposed Blenda, "do not let us think any more about Cousin John at Wenersborg, but only of the pleasure of having him here in Stockholm, which is so much the more remarkable, that, at this very moment, he is supposed to be with his brother and sister-in-law at S——."

"Take care, Mademoiselle Blenda, that you do not let your belief in my magical powers carry you too far; it might, perhaps, cost me but a slight effort to transform myself into the identical detested Cousin John, and then I should like to know what my little cousin would say."

"In the first place," replied Blenda, smiling, "I should faint away, and not come to myself for at least three hours. Next, I should think that the whole of our little romance—for you must admit that all this is very romantic—had been only a dream. And, lastly, in my vexation at so prosaic a conclusion, I should make a vow never to read another novel. But no, upon reflection, I retract, for that punishment would fall upon me alone; in its stead, I would drive you from my presence with every mark of the deepest abhorrence; and that you would richly deserve, because, like the heroes of the old popular traditions, you would have transformed yourself from an enchanted prince into a monster, or worse, for a monster is at any rate a far more poetical creature than a hatter-dresser."

"And would that punishment fall upon *me* alone?" asked Blenda's knight, with a glance so keen and penetrating, that it thrilled to the most secret depths of Blenda's heart.

"That I cannot tell," replied she, blushing. "But pray do not tease me any more about Cousin John, or I shall end by crying about him. Remember that I have been ill, and that people who are but just convalescent must not be excited."

"May I be permitted to request that our cousin would honour us with his company to tea!" With these words Madame von Küh-

len put an end to a jest, which, in her opinion, was being carried almost too far.

"Nothing would give me greater pleasure."

Delighted at this frank acceptance, and no less so at finding her intercourse with the Count placed on so unceremonious a footing, Madame von Kühlen continued, "If I might venture so far, I would add, how delighted we should be, if you would partake of the Christmas fare of rice-porridge in our humble dwelling."

It is scarcely necessary to add that the guest accepted this invitation also with evident pleasure.

"Well, my child," said the delighted mother, "do you think you will be able to sit up to tea?"

"To be sure, Mamma. I feel so well now that I am tempted to think that my faintness was nothing but fancy."

Madame von Kühlen smiled.

"What a delightful evening this is!" continued Blenda. "Well, Cousin John, I will forgive you the offence of wishing to be your own self; so now, bring your chair, and tell me if all this is not so charming, that one could live upon the recollection of it for months?"

"You are quite a prophetess, my little cousin," replied he, in a tone, of which the gaiety was tinged with some degree of sadness.

"What do you mean?"

"That on the second day after Christmas I must leave Stockholm, and—for a long time."

"Indeed!" cried Blenda, with a start, which had nearly upset her cup of tea.

"But during the intervening two days," continued he, in a tone of scarcely repressed tenderness, "allow me at least to place myself entirely at your disposal."

* * * *

It is unnecessary to enter into further particulars concerning the first visit of the "Count." Suffice it to say, that for this evening, Blenda, her mother, and probably their guest also, were as happy as people could possibly be."

When the departure of the latter left the ladies at liberty to express their thoughts, Madame von Kühlen declared it to be her absolute conviction, that this remarkable event was wholly and solely owing to her success in carrying out her views on the disputed point of Blenda's name at her christening, "for never," protested she, "would anything of the sort have come to pass if you had not borne your revered grandmother's name of Concordia."

Blenda was much too happy to dispute any proposition whatever, but for her part she ascribed her happiness to the fact of her having obtained the fascinating peignoir; for was it not as clear as daylight, that it was the unusual charm imparted to her whole appearance by this irresistible article of dress, which had so bewildered the Count, that it had been beyond his power to maintain his assumed character, which he had never been able thoroughly to resume during the whole evening.

"Oh! no, my dear, that is really taking too humble a view of your own pretensions," said Madame von Kühlen, on obtaining some slight

hint of Blenda's thoughts; "I dare say he may have been surprised to find you so elegantly dressed, like a lady of quality, but it was your own attractions which touched his heart."

Blenda smiled.

"How cordial was the Count's gaiety, and that notwithstanding all the difficulties with his haughty family! upon my word, it is quite exemplary to be able to make himself so amiable in the midst of his embarrassments."

"Oh! he can make himself even much more amiable than that," sighed Blenda, as she recollected the preliminary scene of that evening; "but what can he intend to suggest for the next two days? He said he would let us know when he comes to-morrow to enquire after my health."

"Gracious! who can be ringing at the bell so late as this?"

"Is the charwoman gone away?"

She certainly was not, for they heard her voice exclaiming aloud—

"Heaven help us!"

"What can she mean!" exclaimed Madame von Kühlen, rising; but at that moment the door was opened, and, to the amazement of both mother and daughter, a large box, accompanied by a band-box, were thrust into the room by the charwoman, who explained that the bearer of the said articles had stated that he was sent by the linendraper.

"By Patrick!"

Blenda's beaming eyes interchanged a meaningful glance with those of her mother.

"Quite right, my child; I see plainly who has assumed the part of Cousin Patrick, where he can no longer venture to enact that of Cousin John."

Poor Blenda! if her head had not been turned already, it was very near being so now, as she opened the box, and began to examine the piles of beautiful things which it contained.

She laughed aloud with delight as she threw over her shoulders a cachemire cloak, lined with fur; but when she drew forth a bonnet of silver grey satin, with a feather of the same colour, she fairly burst into tears; for surely all this could be only a dream.

Fortunately, when day-light dawned, all the treasures were still there.

This Christmas morning, the happiest of her young life, was also the first on which it had happened to her to have Christmas-boxes to count, an occupation in which her mother, who had not been forgotten either, assisted her with rapturous delight; at the same time examining, admiring, and calculating the value of the gown-pieces, shawls, handkerchiefs, and various other articles of dress, which were quite new, and even unknown to our heroines.

Towards noon the room had assumed pretty much the appearance of a bazaar, and Blenda was engaged in trying on the lovely bonnet for the fifteenth time, when her knight made his appearance, admitted by her mother.

"This is delightful!" exclaimed he, "I find you not only well and blooming, but ready dressed for going out."

"Going out?"

"Yes, as the weather is so fine, and the snow has become quite fit for sleighing, the Doctor has given me leave to inform you, in his name, that a drive would do you a great deal of good."

"A drive!" cried Blenda; "aye, I was sure that I should spend a few days longer in fairy-land. And now what say you to Patrick's taste," continued she, with a motion of her hand, as if to introduce all her newly acquired treasures to him; "I must tell you frankly, that henceforward it will be a difficult matter for any one to supplant *him* in my good graces."

"Ah! *real* cousins are very happy in the privileges they enjoy."

"Indeed! Do you think so?"

"Not only do I think so, but I feel very envious: they can do what . . ."

"Go on."

"What a merely nominal cousin could never venture upon—poor fellow!"

This was said so naturally, and with such a sigh of compassion, that Blenda almost began to doubt whether the presents *could* come from him.

But he thereupon began to criticise Patrick's taste in a manner that brought her back to her previous conclusion; and in the midst of their little dispute, her mother came in and began to enlarge upon her obligations to Patrick, which incense to the *absent* cousin did not, however, seem much to gratify the *present* one; for he soon turned the conversation by reverting to the agreeable proposal which he had already made to Blenda, and which was now gratefully welcomed by both ladies.

* * * *

A drive in a covered sleigh, a dinner at an inn, and an afternoon spent in the enjoyment of music, singing, and agreeable conversation, were more than sufficient to make both mother and daughter fancy themselves indeed transported to fairy-land.

Cousin John was not only an excellent performer on the piano, but he had also a beautiful voice, with which Blenda was delighted. And Blenda, too, sang—not the song of Sir Egbert Montador—for some secret undefined feeling disinclined her to sing this her old favourite song—but some pretty popular air which she had learnt in her old home, and with which her admirer was in his turn delighted.

Last of all, they had a most romantic drive home by moonlight, during which Madame von Kühlen turned over in her own mind what her lamented sister, Regina Sophia, with her strict principles, would have said, if all this had come to pass in her time; while Cousin John, who was seated opposite to Blenda, kept up an animated conversation with her in an under tone.

And the time passed away so rapidly, that the happy lovers were extremely astonished when the sleigh stopped before the door of Madame von Kühlen's abode.

When Cousin John took leave of them, it was settled that the next evening, the last of the three days of happiness, would be most agreeably spent at the theatre. He was anx

ious to take his "aunt" and "cousin" to the Royal Opera House, that wonder of the world, of which Madame von Kühlen had dreamed so often, but which she had never yet been able to see.

It will easily be imagined, that with such a prospect before them, neither mother nor daughter could sleep very soundly.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE THEATRE.

IF Madame von Kühlen and Blenda had been acquainted with the locality, and above all, might they have chosen their own places, it is hardly likely that they would have selected for themselves those into which Cousin John conducted them, for they would have liked to be seen as well as to see.

But what was to be done? Cousin John had chosen the stage-box on the ground floor, and zealously as Madame von Kühlen strove to stretch her head beyond the blinds, she yet declared her conviction, that the people in the open boxes must see a great deal better.

"But here we have the advantage of being quite incognito," replied their well-bred cavalier.

This one magic word sufficed to recall her to a sense of the present. "Aha," thought she, quite astonished that it had not occurred to her before, "no doubt the Count selected this place on purpose not to be seen, in case any member of his proud and haughty family should be present." And in this belief she was strengthened by the fact that the Count showed no inclination to come forward, and look about the house.

Blenda was silent, for she was quite absorbed in what she saw. Her lively mind was drinking in a succession of new impressions; but fearing to appear ridiculous if she attempted to express them in words, she put a constraint upon her feelings: for she had not forgotten Henrietta, and the evening at Gauthier's hippodrome.

"If the mere sight of the opera-house and the spectators absorbs you so completely, Cousin Blenda, I can have very little hope of even a single word being vouchsafed to me, when once the curtain is drawn up!" There was a slight tinge of disappointment in the tone in which Blenda's knight uttered these words.

She turned, and gave him a pleasant beaming smile, but a very transitory one, for at that moment the orchestra began to play the overture, and Blenda now became no less absorbed in listening. She closed her eyes in order to hear the better, and every nerve seemed to thrill with pleasure.

The opera was *Preciosa*, and Cousin John might have got up and gone away a dozen times, without his absence being perceived

by the lady of his heart, so entranced was she by the interest of the performance.

He perceived that she could be happy without him, although she knew that the next morning he was to leave her for a long time; and this thought, which struck upon his heart like the touch of cold steel, flung a shadow over his expressive countenance.

The opera was nothing to him; he had heard and seen it a hundred times. That which interested him was to watch the varying expression it called forth on the beautiful countenance of his young companion. And this countenance now beamed with such delight, and expressed such deep sympathy with all that was passing on the stage, that in spite of her enjoyment, in spite of the pleasure it could not but afford him to see her so happy—his own feeling was one of acute pain.

Cousin John was evidently an egotist—indeed, he acknowledged as much to himself; but his punishment was at hand. He was destined on this evening to experience far keener pangs of jealousy, than the music, the actors, and the decorations had yet cost him.

* * * * *

The curtain fell at the end of the first act. Madame von Kühlen eagerly began to ask questions till she was out of breath, without ever waiting for the answer, or even being able to turn round.

Blenda, however, did turn round, and her eyes sought him who sat beside her.

"I really believe, Cousin Blenda, that you never enjoyed anything so much as this!" said he.

"Indeed you are quite right," she replied, in a tone of delight.

"This is then without exception the happiest evening of your life?"

"I did not say that . . . there are so many different kinds of happiness."

Her eyes sought the pit, not so much from curiosity, as to hide the blushes which crimsoned her cheeks.

"May I ask to whom are you bowing?" enquired Cousin John, as he saw her bend her head.

"Oh, how stupid! in my hurry I forgot that I ought not to have bowed."

"Why not?"

"It is the Chamberlain who is seated there; but he looked at me so imploringly, that I did not know how to be rude to him."

"I think he has been quite sufficiently rude himself to deserve not to be recognised. But, dear me! whom are you again bowing to now?"

This time the bow was a low and very gracious one. And Madame von Kühlen also began a series of bows which indicated a tolerably intimate degree of acquaintance.

"Do you see that gentleman?" asked Blenda eagerly, "the one to the left under the royal box, with the handsome opera-glass in his hand?"

"There are a great many gentlemen with opera-glasses."

"I mean the one with the white neck-cloth."

"Oh! I see. What of him?"

"Can you guess who he is?"

"No; but I think he must be very much interested in the contemplation of you, Cousin Blenda, since he has kept his glasses fixed upon you so long as to make it appear that he is not very well acquainted with the rules of propriety."

"That is Mr. A."

"The Commercial Traveller?"

"Yes. What do you think of him?"

Fortunately for Cousin John, he was spared the necessity of an answer, as at that moment the orchestra struck up, and this time he was not ill-pleased that Blenda's attention should be riveted on the stage, more especially as a great many opera-glasses besides those of the Chamberlain and Mr. A. were by this time attracted to her beautiful face.

But there was worse yet to come.

The act was nearly over, when the door of the corresponding stage-box opened, and two gentlemen entered. No sooner had they seated themselves, than after a hasty glance round the house, their eyes rested on the opposite box. Cousin John noticed that one of the gentlemen gave a sudden start, turned to his neighbour, and again looked straight before him; then a few words were exchanged between the two gentlemen, of which it was not difficult for the attentive lover to guess the subject, since their eyes continued steadfastly fixed upon Blenda; while the countenance of the one who had first observed her, expressed an eagerness and impatience which seemed as though it would constrain her to reward his attention. Blenda, however, had no eyes but for that which was passing on the stage; and after the curtain had fallen, she continued to gaze after the beautiful Preciosa.

At length she turned to the young man who stood waiting behind her, as if on thorns.

"How is it possible that any one can remain unmoved and indifferent at the theatre! And yet, Cousin John, you do not look as if you enjoyed it much."

"To the best of my knowledge, I never said that I enjoyed it at all."

Blenda looked at him in amazement. "But what are you thinking of?"

"Of my departure to-night."

"To-night! Shall you set out to-night?"

The bright sparkle of Blenda's eye fell at once; all that had interested her so much a minute ago was forgotten now.

Madame von Kühlen's attention was so absorbed between the acts by the boxes into which she could see, and the people of whose dress she could take note, that her companions felt as if they were quite alone. But the sagacious mother was in fact at once absent and present, and heard everything, while she made believe to hear nothing.

"Yes," replied Cousin John, "I should not be able to sleep, so I may as well spend the night in travelling . . . When I return . . ."

He paused, but the look which he fixed on Blenda was so eloquent that she turned away in confusion.

And what was the consequence? That she involuntarily looked towards the opposite stage-box, and that the gentleman who had contemplated her so long and so impatiently, made her a courteous and expressive bow, which Blenda blushing returned.

"I really believe, Mademoiselle von Kühlen, that you are acquainted with the whole of the house," said Cousin John, in a tone of remarkable coldness.

At this moment Madame von Kühlen was seized with a violent fit of coughing, which prevented Blenda's reply.

The good lady, who had been listening with half an ear to the conversation between her daughter and her noble son-in-law, gave herself immense credit for her cleverness in effecting a diversion at this critical moment. And indeed she made so great a noise before she could extract her box of lozenges from her bag, which she had contrived to let fall, that she succeeded in breaking the thread of the conversation.

During the search for the bag, she found an opportunity of whispering to her daughter, "Now you have at any rate had time to collect your thoughts, so take care how you answer. I perceive that the Count is as jealous as a Spaniard."

Blenda was amazed; she did not the least understand either what was the matter, or the meaning of her mother's whispered admonition. And Madame von Kühlen, who had no desire to lose any of the amusement of looking about her, and thought she had now fulfilled her duty as a mother, now, after apologizing to the Count, resumed her place, and with it her apparent deafness.

CHAPTER XXXI.

AN EPISODE IN THE OPERA BOX.

WHEN quietness was at length restored, Cousin John again drew near to Blenda. He asked no question, but his eyes reminded her of the subject of their interrupted conversation.

"I forgot," said Blenda, with a slight degree of confusion, which, but for her mother's warning, she would not have felt; "I forgot to tell you that Baron T—sword called upon us a few days ago, and by a mere accident he was admitted."

"That gentleman is probably another of your travelling companions?"

"Why do you ask that in such a tone of vexation?"

She was now perfectly unembarrassed and at her ease, for she perceived that Cousin John was on the point of condemning her unheard.

"I was grieved rather than vexed. Do you not remember telling me that in accordance with the advice of your excellent aunt, you did not intend ever to receive any of those gentlemen?"

"Very true; but be assured," added she, with a little malice, "that my aunt would have been no less strict in regard to other gentlemen."

"That is no answer, Mademoiselle Blenda, and I venture to think . . ."

"What, Cousin?"

"That you will not refuse to tell the friend whose honour you can trust, what it was that induced you to depart from a resolution dictated by a sense of that which you owed to yourself."

"That is easily told . . . it was entirely your fault."

"Then it was probably my fault in somewhat the same manner as was your mistake of the Chamberlain for me."

"Yes, something like it. You know that before Christmas, I was not very well, and I took it into my head that it might possibly occur to a certain individual to come and enquire after my health. Was that so very irrational?"

"Assuredly not."

"Very well. At the identical moment that I was discussing with my mother whether I might not venture to go to Mrs. Gyllenhake's to account for my absence, and so do away with any anxiety that it might have occasioned her, and perhaps, also . . . the individual who had undertaken to escort me home—the charwoman came in and informed us that a young gentleman, whom she had never seen, but who announced himself as an acquaintance of ours, had requested permission to pay us a visit. My mother and I had but one thought. Let him come in! was the reply: and will you still maintain that it was *my* fault, Cousin John, that it was not you, but the Baron, who, having recently lost his father, from whom he inherits an entailed estate, had come a few days before to Stockholm in order to divert his mind?"

"And who immediately on his arrival comes to you to find this diversion, and meets with such a reception that he gives you the history of his life and adventures in return."

"Cousin John, what do you mean? I really do not know you again—you are so unlike yourself."

"It is I, on the contrary, who find it hard to recognise you."

"I assure you, however, that I was so provoked—not with the Baron, of course, but with the person whose fault it was—that if I had been awake on Christmas-eve, and had heard the charwoman announce a 'relation,' I should have certainly recommended my mother not to admit him, since it might so easily be some other person than the right one."

"You speak bitterly," said he after a pause; "but, perhaps, you are justified in

doing so—I acknowledge it. The day will come, however, when you will learn that you are yourself more to blame for the false position which you reproach me for occupying, than I am for the errors into which you fall."

"But have I reproached you at all?"

"Assuredly you have; but as I am now going away, I hope I shall not give occasion to any further mistakes, and until you receive a message from Cousin John . . ."

"Until then," replied Blenda, smiling, "I shall, of course, be deaf and blind to relations, as well as acquaintance. But recollect that this may entail great annoyances likewise."

"How so?"

"Suppose the real Cousin John should wish to pay us a visit, and should be admitted on your account?"

"How ingenious you are in tormenting me!"

"What an idea!"

"Is it a mistaken one?"

"Quite mistaken."

"Well, then, here is a better one. Keep your doors closed until I inform you in writing of my return."

"But if it is very long before that . . ."

"I understand you—I am asking too much—and what right have I to require such a sacrifice? Baron T—sward has, no doubt, already obtained permission to repeat his visits, and of course the Commercial Traveller . . ."

"I cannot conceive, my dear Cousin, what harm those two worthy gentlemen can have done you," said Blenda, with a mischievous smile that was very fascinating; "but you need not make yourself at all uneasy on their account. The Baron has given his promise, and given it quite in earnest, not to molest us further. And as to Mr. A., he would assuredly not expose himself to the mortification of being rejected a second time."

"Meanwhile," replied Cousin John, in the low tremulous tones which awaken so deep a feeling in the bosom in which they find response—"Meanwhile, remember, Blenda, that you are free. I will bind you by no promise. Even should you think that you had proved your own feelings sufficiently to be able to give it, I could not venture to accept it until you were aware to *whom* it was given."

At this moment the *entr'acte*, which to the rest of the spectators had seemed tediously long, came to an end, and the curtain rose; but whether it rose or fell was now alike to Blenda; she did not even turn her eyes that way, much less her thoughts, which all lingered in the stage-box where she was seated, and which was moreover in some degree darkened by the person of Madame von Kühlen, who, perceiving how matters stood, leant forward and filled up nearly the whole of the front with her own person.

In the twilight thus produced, Blenda could however plainly perceive the almost painful emotion depicted on the countenance of her lover; and for the first time since the com-

mencement of their romantic intercourse, she felt a burning kiss pressed upon her hand. Her own agitation became too great for words, and she only replied by two bright tears, which seemed to reproach him for having been able even to speak, or think of her as free.

He understood them, and treasured them up in his heart.

"And if I were poor—really poor—with an obscure name, and yet more obscure position; if I stood before you divested of the halo thrown around me by the mystery of our intercourse—what then, Blenda?"

"Then," replied Blenda, proudly and joyfully, "I should hasten to give you that which now you hesitate to ask."

"Will you, then, during my absence, ponder these words, to me so unspeakably precious? You are young and romantic, not only by nature but by education. You are—forgive my frankness—you are vain, but rather from youthful thoughtlessness than from any defect of character. And perhaps you have dreamed a brilliant and dangerous dream; I almost fear it is so. But now, at this moment of, to me, most deep and serious import, I solemnly assure you that I am not a man of rank or distinction."

"Oh, hush! hush!—why do you tell me that?"

"Because it is my duty! The lot which I could offer you has nothing brilliant in it. It would not, indeed, be poverty, but yet would be far removed from wealth and luxury. There is only one kind of wealth which I could offer you in abundance; and all depends upon the question whether *that* wealth would be of value in your eyes."

"I think you do me injustice," replied Blenda, very much delighted at the little comedy the Count was acting; for it did not occur to her even for a moment to suppose that his words were true.

She knew that her lover was a wealthy and high-born nobleman, and that all which he had said to her had only been to try her. But at this moment of rapturous excitement, she heartily wished that he were the most insignificant of mankind, in order that she might have the opportunity of proving to him how pure and deep was her affection for himself,—how far removed from being based upon pride and vanity, even if it were in some degree alloyed by feelings so little worthy.

"No, believe me, I do you justice—at least I hope I am not mistaken . . . But we have yet to see whether time advances or injures my cause. Once more I repeat it—you are free, free as air. If your feelings are sincere, no vows are needed to secure their durability."

"That is true; but . . . if you would not take it amiss,—if you would not misinterpret my question . . ."

"Ask me anything, everything you please."

"Well, then, I should like a definite time to be fixed for your return."

"And why so?"

"Why?—of course that I may have it to look forward to."

"Thank you—thank you a thousand times for such a reply. But my absence must depend upon circumstances. Possibly I may not always be far distant; but, until I am fully convinced of that which I desire to ascertain, I must remain absent."

Neither Blenda nor her lover could conceive how it was possible that the play should have come to an end, during their whispered conversation, which, unconsciously to themselves, had lasted from the third to the conclusion of the fourth act; but it was over, nevertheless; and it was with a feeling of secret triumph that Cousin John said,—

"I must beg you to forgive me for having deprived you of so much pleasure. I hope that some day I shall be able to make amends to you, with as many plays as you may like to see, for the loss of which I have now been the cause. I hope you are not quite inconsolable for it, Cousin Blenda?"

"I am only very much surprised at not being so,—for I am sure I ought to be."

"Oh, my dear," interposed Madame von Kühlen, consolingly, "I will tell you all about the story; and the music you could not help hearing."

A doubting smile played upon the lips of Cousin John, and was reflected on the countenance of Blenda. How happy were both at that moment!

But there were others by whom their happiness was envied, who followed the ladies, as they left their box, and bestowed a minute scrutiny on their companion.

Madame von Kühlen and Blenda recognised no one amongst the crowd in the lobby. But their cavalier observed all that passed, and whispered to Blenda, whose arm rested within his own,—

"Do not forget that it is *your cousin* who has escorted you to the play this evening. Should any one ask you, that will be a sufficient answer."

It was not until Blenda entered the covered sleigh that, by the light of the lantern, she perceived the young Baron. He was standing close beside her, his eyes fixed with a doubtful expression on her companion. Observing this, she said aloud,—

"My dear Cousin, would you be so kind as to take charge of my muff?"

"Her Cousin!" muttered the Baron. "So far that is well; but at all events he is much too handsome a cousin. He must have entertained her remarkably well, too, during the last two acts . . . That young girl really drives me mad! The more I resolve to think no more about her, the more perseveringly does her image haunt me . . . Why was it that all of a sudden she ceased to take any interest in the play? Perhaps she did not feel well—for she has been ill . . . At any rate, I must find out whether this Cousin visits her, and whether it was he whom she was so anxious to see when she cried because she might not go out—he who would be none the worse for a little anxiety."

* * * *

We will say nothing of the parting between our heroine and her mysterious admirer. Their farewell words were exchanged on their way home in the sleigh; and their hands were for the first time clasped in each other's, as they stopped at the door of Madame von Kühlen's abode.

Such partings have their measure of sweetness almost equal to that of pain; when the hope of a joyful reunion gilds the sadness of the present hour.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE BROTHERHOOD OF CHARITY.

AFTER three such delightful days, it was no easy matter for Blenda to return to the routine of every-day life. But the thought that she was "free as air"—which, according to the interpretation of her heart, signified that from that moment forward she was bound to her absent lover both for time and for eternity, gave her courage to endure even the monotony of ordinary existence, which was, moreover, susceptible of great improvement, when contemplated through the beautifying medium of a brilliant imagination.

Blenda therefore determined to look upon that portion of her life, which should intervene between the departure of the Count and his return (even should it amount to years), as a species of purgatory, out of which she should emerge, refined and purified, into the paradise which sooner or later was in store for her.

In order to turn this period to account, she resolved to perfect herself, by dint of extraordinary diligence, in all the accomplishments which she had the opportunity of acquiring; and moreover, she would study without ceasing the books with which she ought originally to have begun.

Her hero had often smiled at her romantic ideas: very good, she would no longer be a heroine of romance, either in feeling or in conduct, she would restrain her heated fancy by reflection, and would be like other young girls, who are content to read a novel, enjoy, and perhaps profit by it; that is, she would no longer enact the characters which her fervid imagination had always been so ready to assume.

These good resolutions being formed, nothing remained but to carry them into execution.

With the first there was no difficulty: she soon played and sang so well, as to think with positive horror of the self-confidence with which, but a short time before, she had been ready to go out as a teacher. Besides this, she pursued with great diligence, not only under the guidance of Mrs. Gyllenhake, but also alone, the course of reading which had been gradually taken up, and which appeared much less calculated to entertain the old lady, than to develop the understanding of the young one.

But in spite of all these efforts, and notwithstanding that, in really critical encounters (of which we shall subsequently have to speak), she knew how to assume the tranquil dignity which, in her opinion, was on all occasions befitting a sensible, well-educated, and unromantic woman, yet nothing could effectually curb her restless imagination.

She used her utmost endeavours, which she carried even to a pitch of absurdity, to check its flight. She transformed herself into a respectable matron, a sort of imitation Mrs. Gyllenhake: but all was of no avail; in spite of all her outward composure, her inward spirit could not be restrained from the most fantastic excursions.

On such occasions she sometimes fancied herself on her own estates, receiving a brilliant circle of society, of which she herself was the centre, the life-giving sun; sometimes at court, attracting the favourable notice of their majesties, envied, admired, and observed; sometimes at the theatre with her beloved "Leicester;" (for she often fancied herself Amy Robsart;) and then she would recal, with a bright sweet smile, the remembrance of her first evening there, and of the interesting episode in the stage-box—a remembrance which her still devoted and adoring Leicester would pronounce to be the brightest of his whole life.

But every time she awoke from such a dream, she did so with a feeling of dismay, unable to understand how it was that, despite all her exertions, she was powerless to free herself from this romantic confusion of ideas.

It was not until long after, that she comprehended why the study of romances had produced a different effect upon her from that which it habitually does upon other people.

A really good novel, written in a healthy tone, is no unprofitable study; but in order to derive advantage from it, the mind must have undergone training of another kind. Blenda's education, as we know, had begun at the wrong end, and she had now to reap the fruits of her mother's folly—by no means a singular case—in fostering the imagination of her child at the expense of the other powers of her mind.

Happy for our heroine, the consequence of the first impression made upon her heart, preserved her from the danger of those to which she was subsequently exposed; and it was perhaps her fresh young love alone—inasmuch as it was fortunately bestowed upon a worthy object—which preserved her from falling an easy prey to admiration and flattery.

"I know what I will do," said Blenda to herself one day, after striving for a long time in vain to devise a remedy for the evil which she desired to overcome. "I will become a Sister of Mercy; and then I am convinced that all these dangerous dreams, as he called them, will fly from me, and that I shall succeed in being like other people, except that I hope to be better, and more useful to my fellow-creatures."

Blenda had not the slightest misgiving that this admirable resolve was but a fresh effort

of her fertile imagination, rather than the offspring of genuine Christian feeling; but she would have been delighted could she have assumed the dress of a nun, to enter upon her new vocation. Unfortunately that was out of the question, but to make amends for it, she plunged all the more zealously into the work itself.

* * * * *

"In the name of goodness, Blenda, where is it that you spend your time?" asked her mother, one day as she entered the room.

Surprised that her daughter remained out later every day without assigning any reason for it, Madame von Kühlen had that day, as Blenda's absence lasted longer than ordinary, sent to Mrs. Gyllenhake's, and learned that Blenda left her every day at the appointed hour of the forenoon, and had done so that day as usual.

"In the dwellings of the poor, mother," replied Blenda, with crimsoned cheeks and beaming eyes; "now that my work is fairly set going, I no longer wish to make any secret of it."

"I do not understand you, my dear."

"Yet it is very easy to understand; is it not my duty to repay to those who are in distress, the kindness I myself receive?"

"My dear Blenda, I have nothing to say against that: on the contrary, I have always encouraged you to send your little donation to poor old Britta, although I cannot say that any encouragement was needed."

"Yes, but she is only *one*."

"That is true, and in your future exalted position, it will be your privilege to extend your assistance to multitudes of the unfortunate; nor indeed can I find fault with you, if now that you have time to spare, you seek out those who are most deserving, so that in future you may know upon whom your benefits should be bestowed. But as yet, you have nothing to give."

"Oh yes, a great deal."

"A great deal!—what?"

"I give sympathy to all, care to the sick, and even money—at least they obtain money through my means,—besides, I give them clothes, which I can spare." (Madame von Kühlen would have been very much horrified, had she instituted an inspection of her daughter's wardrobe). . . . "Oh mother, you can have no idea of the misery which lurks hidden in this place. How happy I am to be able to wipe away the tears of others; it makes me really long to be rich!"

"But listen, my dear—delightful as all this is, I must warn you against going about so much alone."

"Why so?"

"Why, you know the poor Baron—who will, I am sure, die of love for you yet—has been here several times this month, notwithstanding his promise."

"But, Mamma, why did you allow it?"

"Allow it, indeed? Is that the question now? Do you think I am a stone? Besides, he is so good, and so civil—but every time he comes, I perceive, although he does not say a word, that he is more and more in love."

"But what has that to do with what we were talking of?"

"This; that I think, if he knew anything about your walks, he would take the opportunity of following you."

"He follow me!—no, he does not follow me . . . quite the contrary!"

"What do you mean?"

"That he meets me—in short, that I have met him several times."

"And you say that so quietly, when at first you seemed so uneasy, and so afraid of his visits?"

"Yes, for at that time I was very little acquainted with him."

"And do you know him better now?" asked Madame von Kühlen, opening her eyes wide.

Blenda nodded her head significantly.

"My child! you are not going to have secrets from your mother?"

"Oh, dear no, Mamma, not the shadow of one; I will tell you all about it."

"I am sure you will—but there is one thing I cannot help fearing—surely you have not grown indifferent to the Count—you are not thinking of exchanging a Count's for a Baron's coronet—that would be very wrong of you."

"I grow indifferent to the Count!" exclaimed Blenda, with a look of horror "I cease to love him, whom I have looked upon as my guardian angel, from the first moment that I saw him! Never! never!"

"Well, but what footing are you on with the Baron?"

"He! Oh, he is my brother!" replied she simply.

Madame von Kühlen, who, as she said herself, "was very particular about propriety," could not restrain an exclamation of dismay.

"Child! child! if I could allow you to call the Secretary your Uncle, he being as good as betrothed to somebody else—and if you may call the Count, who is to be your husband, Cousin—still, it will never do for you to adopt the Baron as your brother."

"And why not?"

"How can you ask? If he wishes to pass for your brother, it is only in order to disguise the lover under that semblance."

"Disguise the lover!"

"Yes—and mind what you are about—for I cannot consent to such doings."

"But he has not merely *assumed* the name. In order to keep my restless imagination within bounds, I determined to make the best use of my powers, by becoming, what is called in France, a Sister of Mercy; and for the same purpose, and encouraged by my example, he has made himself a Brother of Mercy. When we have examined into the circumstances of the needy, he dispenses amongst them large sums of money with the utmost liberality. Oh! I am sure he is the most noble-minded and generous of men."

"But, I tell you, child, I insist upon knowing how all this has come about . . . Brother of Mercy! It has a strange sound, upon my word!"

"And yet the whole affair is so simple, that you will understand it in a moment."

"Well, then, let me hear."

"You must know that I had resolved to alter myself altogether, and to become, in all respects, like other young women . . . to be sure, I do not know how they feel, but they always look so calm and pleasant: in short, I wanted to be quite different from what I was."

"How silly! The Count is delighted with you just as you are."

"Yes; but I know that he would be more delighted with me, if I were less romantic."

"Nonsense, you little goose!"

"I do not know whether I *am* such a little goose still; for do you know, mother, what happened to me the other day?"

"What?"

"One morning, that Mrs. Gyllenhake was gone out, I sat down to the piano, for I had a fancy to try how my old favourite song would sound—I had never had courage to sing it again, since the time that I was so laughed at by that odious Chamberlain—I only wish his foolish travels may last for ever."

"You are wandering from the subject."

"Not exactly—for whether it were that Bertha's song had excited so much ridicule, or that my own taste has changed, it almost seemed, even to me, as if it were a little foolish; and when, in the evening, I took up the book, to read about Bertha and Agnes, and their knight, you will never guess what happened . . ."

"You had better, then, save me the trouble of guessing," replied Madame von Kühlen, with a somewhat clouded brow.

"Only think! I yawned, and at last, fell into a doze, and let the book drop, and I have never since cared to ascertain whether that was an accident, or whether my old predilections really are changed."

Madame von Kühlen was silent a few minutes, and then said gravely:—"My respected grandmother, who had seen the world, used to say that a contempt for old and cherished recollections or habits, was the result either of pride or of folly. I only hope that your increased knowledge may not lead to any such evil;—but that you should think the song of Sir Egbert foolish—which has so often made your heart beat—that you should yawn over the history of those whose generosity and heroism have so often moved you to tears—hem! that is a change!"

"It is the influence of new thoughts and feelings which are at work within me," pleaded Blenda. "I cannot but be glad that I am no longer under the dominion of the old ones."

"Yet it is they that have made you what you are!" interposed Madame von Kühlen dogmatically. "But never mind that now, and let us return to the Baron . . . So you became a Sister of Mercy?"

"Yes; in order to destroy the last vestiges of romance in my brain, I determined to devote a portion of my time to the poor; but, on the very first day, as I was coming back from Tyskbagarbergen,* whither I had gone for

that purpose, I met the Baron. He greeted me with so much friendly courtesy, that, although I know I looked very grave and dignified, I could not refuse him one little smile."

"Well, there was no harm in that."

"So I thought; and really I was smiling to myself, as it was. I felt so happy, for I knew that I had caused happiness where I had been; and that he should meet me just then was the fault of chance, and not mine; that is, if it were a fault at all."

"Well, but something more was required before he could style himself your brother."

"Wait a minute. He stopped and said, 'Mademoiselle von Kühlen, I am persuaded that, in spite of the antipathy you evince for me, you will find that there yet exists *some* kind of sympathy between us.'"

"In what respect?" I asked.

"You will discover that hereafter," he replied, and disappeared in the direction from whence I came."

"I am perfectly convinced," said her mother, "that this meeting was not accidental. No doubt he had often followed you at a distance from Mrs. Gyllenhake's, and having done so on this day also, and ascertained whither you went, had waited for you, and made believe to meet you by chance on his way to go and do good like yourself. He knew very well what impression that would produce upon you. But go on."

"Supposing it really were as you think, there was no harm done, nevertheless; for the next day, when I went to my *protégés*, they were altogether better off. They had got comfortable beds, instead of straw and rags; and money besides; and they told me that soon after I went away, a young gentleman had come, who told them that an angel had sent him to their assistance."

"But, my child, that was delightfully interesting. I cannot understand how you could conceal all this from me."

"It would not have been right of me to boast—the Sisters of Mercy never boast of what they accomplish; but then it was equally incumbent upon me to answer you, whenever you questioned me in earnest."

"Very good, very good! What happened after that?"

"That wherever I went, I was sure the next day to find traces of the Baron, who had come in the name of the Angel."

"Excellent young man!" exclaimed Madame von Kühlen, with warmth; "he is a rival worthy of the Count."

"I think so too; and therefore, since I could not accept his homage as a lover, I told him five days ago, when I met him again, and he gazed at me with such imploring eyes, that I looked upon him as a brother, and that I was happy to share with him my attendance on the poor."

"Of course such an admission delighted him, for he doubtless heard only the latter part of the speech."

"Of course, I could not say anything to him about my connexion with the Count, as he had not the least idea of it; and therefore, what I

* Situated at the furthest point of Ladugardsland, the north-eastern suburb of Stockholm.

did say made him very happy. He kissed my hand with great warmth, and assured me that he was ready to dedicate a fourth part of his income to the noble purpose, the joys of which I had revealed to him . . . and then he added a few words, which certainly bore a considerable resemblance to that which you suspect—concerning our first meeting at Tyskbagarbergen.”

“But, my dear, I still do not know whether it would be proper for you to go on thus.”

“Why not, Manma? I am sure there is no harm in it.”

“Yes; but if the Count, of whom we have heard nothing now for two months, were to return unexpectedly, he might become jealous in earnest. . . . You remember how it was that night at the Opera. . . . And blameless as is your intercourse with the Baron, it might be altogether misinterpreted by your lover.”

“Good heavens! I never thought of that!” cried Blenda, turning pale. “To-morrow then I must tell the Baron—though without betraying my secret—that we can no longer go on as we have done hitherto.”

“Quite right, my child; that is a duty which you owe to your future husband, as well as to yourself; for malicious tongues might cast a slur upon your reputation, if you should be seen walking about with a young man.”

“Very true—very true!”

CHAPTER XXXIII.

REAPPEARANCE.

It was with a feeling of considerable uneasiness, in anticipation of the part she had to play, which would require the utmost circumspection and self-control, that Blenda went the next day to Mrs. Gyllenhake's; and so absorbed was she in thought, that she did not even perceive a lady whom she nearly ran against in the street, until the latter exclaimed—

“Dear me! Is not this my little Simplicity in such elegant attire? . . . Well, and how are you and your mother?”

“Oh, Henrietta! What an agreeable surprise! Have you not heard of our well-being from Patrick, who has been kind enough to call and see us several times since Christmas?”

“To be sure he has; but that is no reason why I should not inquire myself, when the opportunity presents itself. I hear you still continue your office of reader to the old lady who is so amazingly kind to you.”

“Yes, *amazingly* kind, that is the very word for it. You cannot think how much I owe her. I have been taking music and singing lessons for the last three months from the excellent master whom she has procured for me.”

“Well, she is really a model patroness! . . . But I should like to be told further particulars of your good fortune, and especially to hear you sing and play.”

“You are very kind.”

“Suppose you come home and spend the day with me.”

“I am very much obliged to you for the invitation, but I do not know . . .”

“Now do not be a goose. You surely would not think of being affronted because I have not called upon you? But in the first place, as you know, there was a little misunderstanding between us—and afterwards if I had been inclined to take offence I might have had some excuse for it, since you and your mother neither accepted my invitation to dinner, nor so much as thanked me for it.”

“My dear Henrietta, you surely understood our reasons for declining your invitation.”

“No, indeed.”

“In the first place, I thought you did not like me; and then I was hurt at the many unkind things you had said to me about the Chamberlain. And lastly, I had not courage to meet cousin John.”

This threefold reply brought a blush to Henrietta's cheeks. She could not deny that Blenda was right in that which concerned herself; but now the times were changed, and Mrs. Patrick with them.

In the first place, the poor relations appeared to be in a position to require no further help, which raised them considerably in the opinion of the rich relation—and Blenda's well-chosen attire certainly did not convey the idea of a poor needlewoman. Secondly, the Chamberlain was not only out of the kingdom, but what was far better, out of the question; for as we have already seen, he had been nothing to Henrietta beyond the amusement of a few idle hours. Lastly, John had acknowledged, during the memorable drive to Barkatz, that he had lost his heart while on his travels; and it was but too evident that the chains wound around him by the stranger, be she who she might, would not be broken by any other influence.

The result of all this was, that as Henrietta had no possible cause to feel jealous of Blenda; and moreover, had no reason now to fear being seen in company with a *pauvre honteuse*, she saw no better means of gratifying her curiosity than by inviting Blenda to pay her a friendly visit.

This curiosity was so lively that she had long since resolved upon satisfying it by some means or other. It was excited by the reports of Deborah, who occasionally paid a visit in Knight street, and to whom Madame von Kühlen, finding her precious secret very difficult to keep to herself, had given the slightest possible hint concerning a man of distinction who had become a silent victim to Blenda's charms.

But to return to the interview between the two ladies.

“Do not think any more about it,” was Henrietta's reply to Blenda's excuse. “The little coolness between us arose simply and solely out of my mother-in-law's extreme partiality for you. I loved the dear old lady so much that I was jealous of the progress you made in her favour. But all that is forgotten now, as well as the nonsense about the Chamberlain.”

"All that is very nice; but . . . you must not misunderstand me."

"Oh, . . . I was forgetting your last reason. As far as John is concerned you may set your mind still more at ease. He thinks no more of you than of any one else! And I will tell you in confidence, that I have reason to believe that had he obeyed my mother-in-law's desire, it would have been at the sacrifice of a serious attachment."

"Did he really love his mother so much as that?"

"It is possible that there were and perhaps are still, some obstacles in the way of his wishes. Be that as it may, however, he left Stockholm yesterday, and will not return for some weeks. Therefore you can have no reason for persisting in your refusal."

Blenda could not resist Henrietta's kindness; and besides, why should she, now that she was assured that her cousin John's affections were already disposed of? She therefore promised to come as soon as her visit to Madame Gylenhake was over, and she had informed her mother whither she was going."

* * * *

"My patients must do without me to-day," said the young Sister of Mercy to herself, as Henrietta turned away. The fact was, she was not at all sorry to obtain a brief respite from the painful duty she had to perform towards her brother.

"How he will watch for me!" said she, with a sigh. "Poor man! I am sure he will be very much grieved when he hears that we must each of us perform our works of charity alone."

Her thoughts thus sadly dwelling on the young Baron, Blenda entered the house of her aged friend.

It appeared, however, as if she were at that moment struck by a sudden presentiment, for as lightly as a roe she bounded to the piano-forte and took possession of a large bouquet that lay upon it, the stalks bound round with a strip of paper.

There was no one in the room, so Blenda could give the reins to her folly without restraint; and with rapturous delight she kissed and caressed this token of remembrance from her lover, the first she had received for three months.

When she had sufficiently contemplated the flowers, the strip of paper claimed her attention, but she deferred the examination of it as long as possible. Perhaps it was a mere idle fancy of her own that something might be written upon it, and in that case she had better put off dispelling the illusion as long as possible. Curiosity, however, at length obtained the upper hand—the strip of paper was unfolded—it was indeed written upon, and contained the following words:—

"If it is for the sake of the needy that their kind protectress has associated a companion with her in her walks, a sum of money is entrusted to the care of Mrs. Gylenhake, which will serve to replace a portion, at least, of that which Baron T—sward devotes to their relief. . . . If, however,

the good Angel of the afflicted desires the companionship for her own sake, this communication from an absent friend will be altogether superfluous.

"JOHN."

Blenda's consternation was such that she had nearly fallen to the ground. What had she done?—offended her lover?—awakened his suspicions, and that at the very moment when she had resolved to be reason and prudence itself.

Her loud sobs, which she did not attempt to check, must have been audible in the next room, for the door opened, and the kind old lady entered.

"What is the matter with my little Made-moiselle Blenda?" asked she kindly, as, with maternal familiarity, she took her hand.

"Oh, I am so unhappy!" and Blenda pressed the kind hand respectfully to her lips.

"But what has happened?"

"Something which I shall never get over in all my life."

"My dear, there is no trouble for which consolation is nowhere to be found. Believe me, I am old, and have had experience."

"Yes, if I dared, God knows, I should be only too willing to believe you; but then you see it was—it was—"

"Come, let me hear all about it."

"Oh, I have been very thoughtless! although it was—indeed it was—with the very best intentions. And now, if he who wrote this note could only know that I was not wrong, or rather *why* I was wrong—for I was wrong and not wrong both at once—he certainly would not judge me so severely as he does now; but he will never know. . . ."

"What will he never know?"

"That I meant this very day to tell the Baron . . . for it is he who accompanied me in my visits to the poor people . . . that he must in future seek out the objects of his charity alone. I came to the conclusion that this was necessary, in consequence of a long conversation with my mother yesterday evening."

"And you mean to carry out this sensible resolution at once?"

"Yes, to-morrow."

"And why not to-day?"

"Because, my dear Aunt"—Blenda had long since been permitted to bestow this title upon her old friend—"because I met my cousin, Mrs. Patrick Thorman, in the street just now, and she pressed me to come and spend the afternoon with her . . . besides, I shall be none the worse for having a little time to think it over. For, of course, you understand, dear Aunt, that it is not an easy, nor a pleasant thing to have to say all that to the good Baron."

"Oh, hush, hush! that is no doubt, then, the young gentleman whom I have seen here, walking up and down before the house while you were singing! You certainly are not very cautious, my dear girl."

"Oh, do not reproach me! I am so un-

happy as it is, that my life is quite a burden to me!"

"Come, I am sure that is exaggerating."

"No, no, indeed it is not! . . . But now, if I were to write a few lines to the person who sent this bouquet, would they reach him? You have never mentioned his name, dear Aunt, but still I am sure you know who I mean."

"Dry your eyes . . . for here comes your master. Go into my bedroom and write as fast as you can, and I will keep Mr. E. in conversation meanwhile."

Blenda did not require the permission to be repeated.

* * * * *

She opened the door of the bedroom, and would have given vent to her surprise in a loud exclamation, if Cousin John, who stood before her, had not laid his finger on his lips.

"Good Heavens! are you here, Cousin John?" whispered she, trembling like an aspen leaf, while the delight that beamed in her eyes banished every fear from the bosom of her lover.

"Yes, Blenda, I am here for a few minutes, in order to convince myself that the fear by which my heart has been tortured was an idle one . . . Speak, delay not a moment—the Baron . . . what is the meaning of these familiar—these incomprehensible meetings?"

"And was not I to be free as air?" replied Blenda, with a mischievous smile: for, now that she could explain all, she no longer felt any fear; and it was but fair to torment Cousin John a little in return for the pain he had so recently inflicted upon her.

"Undoubtedly," replied Blenda's knight, "and you are so still."

"There! then you see, Cousin, how absurd it was to write such a note. Do you not understand that those who are free have no account to render for their actions?"

"Except to their own consciences, tormentor!"

"Certainly; and my conscience does not reproach me for having allowed a Brother of Mercy to accompany me."

"But the Brother of Mercy will be dismissed to-morrow?"

"Yes; but I will not jest on that subject," added she, suddenly altering her tone; "the Baron is an excellent man, and . . ."

"And now you are going to pity him! this is worse than all. Oh! Blenda, you will drive me to despair—to despair because you allow so many to share your favour . . ."

"Oh! do not be unjust, Cousin John," replied she, blushing crimson. "What I bestow upon others is as nothing, compared to that which . . ."

She paused, and turned away.

"Compared to that which" . . . go on, I entreat you."

"That which I reserve for one alone."

"Enough! enough!" cried he, his dark eyes flashing with unutterable joy: "I ask no more—as yet!"

"And you are satisfied—convinced?"

"Perfectly so . . . But be cautious. Let no one suspect that there is one whose prospects of future happiness depend solely upon the words which you have even now uttered. Will you promise that?"

"Yes; you may depend upon me."

"Farewell, then, till we meet again . . . Farewell, my dear, dear Blenda."

"Oh, one moment more! when shall we meet again?" and her trembling voice gave evidence of the pain she felt in parting, which she strove to repress.

"Do not ask me! It will be when I think I may count upon the heart which I am now striving to win. But a few minutes ago, I believed I was in danger of losing it."

Blenda answered only by a smile, but it was so expressive that it might well supply the place of words.

The next moment Cousin John had vanished. But momentary as had been both the meeting and the parting, Blenda's cheerfulness was quite restored; for she bore a world of happiness in her heart.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

WARNINGS AND COUNSELS.

No sooner was the music lesson over, and the master gone, than Blenda, giving way to the delight which had been till then repressed, threw herself into the arms of her aged friend.

"Oh, my dear Aunt, do speak to me of him! What is the reason of this reserve?"

"It was his own wish."

"But now he can neither wish nor exact it, since he has actually shown himself here."

"I have no objection to talk about him, provided you do not require me to answer certain questions to which I am not at liberty to reply."

"No; I will ask no questions which can embarrass you—indeed, I have no occasion to do so. I know a great deal more than he thinks."

"Indeed! and what is it that you know?"

"Oh, the chief thing of all!"

"And that is?"

"I might reply to you in three words, that I love him; for that is really the chief thing,—is it not?"

"Undoubtedly; but after that?"

"The chief thing after that is, that I know who is the sorcerer who has stolen away my heart."

"You are on a false scent, little goose!"

"No, indeed."

"Yes, indeed. I have heard from himself that you believe yourself to be acquainted with his name and station."

"Well?"

"But you know neither the one nor the other."

"My dear Aunt, you are mistaken."

"On the contrary, it is you who do all in your power to deceive yourself. I would lay any wager that you take him for a man of very high rank."

Blenda's crimsoned cheek sufficiently revealed the correctness of this surmise.

"Yes, yes," continued Mrs. Gyllenhake, who seemed perfectly to comprehend the answer; "I knew that I was right: poor child!"

"But. . . ."

"No evasions, Blenda! You believe that with him you will obtain admittance to the highest circles of society?"

"Yes, I confess that I do."

"And I again repeat, that you deceive yourself, and must renounce this idle dream unconditionally and for ever."

"Meanwhile," returned Blenda, decidedly, "nothing in the world can have power to shake my conviction. What may be your object in seeking to persuade me of the contrary, I know not; but this I know, that even if I had not seen with my own eyes, and heard with my own ears, that which proves him to be a man of high rank, I should yet believe it,—such confidence have I in my own instinct."

"I tell you, my little girl, that your imagination is so uncontrolled, that you live in a perfect dreamland; and that the day will come when you will laugh at your own folly, as I do now. . . . But one thing I must represent to you in serious earnest."

"What is it?"

"That you are offering the greatest affront to him whom you some day hope to call your husband."

"Good heavens!—how so?"

"Very obviously, since you give no heed to his own merits, but only to those which you yourself attribute to him."

"Oh, pray do not say that!"

"I shall say more: I must warn you, lest you should drive him from you for ever, for the sake of this self-willed fancy. Do you think it does not give him pain, and great pain, to be compelled to believe that your love and the happiness of both can be dependant upon his station in society?"

"But indeed, indeed, they are not."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Quite certain."

"Then, if his name were Johnson, or Peterson, or Lundgren, or any other name just as respectable. . . ."

Blenda turned pale.

"His name cannot be Johnson! . . ."

"Why not?"

"But that is horrible."

"Horrible?—indeed! I once knew a judge of a County Court, who was a very excellent and amiable man, and whose name was Johnson. But if you like better to be Mrs. Peterson, I have no objection."

"I like the one as little as the other," exclaimed Blenda, laughing; "and I think I shall escape them both."

She had quite recovered her gaiety, and Mrs. Gyllenhake's jest produced no effect.

"I see you are incorrigible!" resumed her aged friend, for the first time assuming an air almost of severity. "Do you then really think it possible that even in jest I could so obstinately maintain an untruth?"

"If—if he had begged you. . . ."

"He merely begged me to be of service to you as far as lay in my power. He also begged me never to breathe his name, nor even to appear conscious of his existence. And I should have continued to act accordingly, if your childish imprudence had not induced him to come hither."

"But," urged Blenda, "if he really is not what I believe him to be, why did he not say so from the first?"

"It is his business to explain that. But now, my dear, you must go, if you wish to be at Mrs. Thorman's by dinner-time."

"But you are not angry with me, Aunt?"

"I am only concerned about you. But I hope—indeed, I may say I know—that your heart is better than your little head, which is so nearly turned."

"That is not a very gracious answer. Is my head such a very worthless one?"

"I do not say that. . . . The head will be good enough when all its foolish fancies have been dismissed."

"I suppose I must be satisfied with that concession. Good bye, my dear Aunt; I have passed many a pleasant hour here, but to-day I have to thank you for the pleasantest of all."

"That is easily understood. Good-bye, my child."

Blenda departed, and the whole of her conversation with Mrs. Gyllenhake faded from her mind like a morning mist, when the sun—by which I mean the recollection of her previous interview—again broke forth. She smiled gaily to herself, repeating every word that her lover had addressed to her; and recollecting, above all, the statement, that his late alarm had made a longer probation of her feelings necessary.

"He shall have no more cause for fear," said she to herself; "and after I have had my last interview with the Baron to-morrow, I will not even look at a man, always excepting my good Cousin Patrick."

* * * * *

The afternoon spent with Henrietta proved a very pleasant one to Blenda, as the former could be exceedingly agreeable and cordial when she chose; and she was now not merely friendly, but evinced so much anxiety to obtain the entire confidence of her young cousin, that the latter would very probably have betrayed all her secrets, had not Cousin John's warning suddenly recurred to her mind. It would have been very pleasant to our heroine to have confided the whole story to Henrietta; as this could not be, however, she was regaled with all particulars concerning the Baron; and in return informed Blenda, that, on coming home that morning, she had been informed by Patrick that he had just received a visit which concerned his little cousin.

"Good heavens! could the Count have

suddenly changed his mind, and . . .” But here she paused abruptly, turning pale at the recollection of her own thoughtlessness.

“Count!” exclaimed Henrietta, seizing upon this new idea at once. “Have you got a Count besides? Why, you must have had a whole dozen of admirers!”

“Oh no!” stammered Blenda, “not even half-a-dozen!”

“Well, we will count! . . . Let me see .

The Lieutenant, one; the Secretary, two; . . . the Baron, three; . . . the Commercial Traveller, four; . . . John, unknown to himself, through my mother-in-law, five; . . . the Chamberlain, (a great catch he was indeed!) six; . . . and the Count, who has made his appearance so unexpectedly, seven; . . . Upon my word, that is a good beginning! I never had more than three at a time.”

“And surely that is enough!” said Blenda, smiling.

“Granted; but I shall not let you off so easily on the subject of the Count, your seventh lover.”

“Oh, dear Henrietta, pray be content with the half-dozen. Of course you understand that was a slip of the tongue. I meant the *Baron*.”

“Well, I suppose I must believe you. . . . You must remember, however, that admirers are not always suitors, and that, notwithstanding this abundance of lovers, you may remain an old maid, if you refuse to listen to the Commercial Traveller; for you must know that it is he who, having lately returned from a journey, has been here to call upon Patrick, and beg him to use his influence as a relation, to persuade your mother to receive his visits.”

“No, no, not for the world!” cried Blenda, in a tone of desperation, caused by the thought that she had *another* rival to keep out of the way of the Count. “I want no admirers; on the contrary, I have good reason that they could all be swept away in a body, for I am sure they bring me nothing but embarrassment and vexation.”

“Possibly,” cried Henrietta. “It would be a good plan, however, if you would speak to your Commercial Traveller yourself; for, believe me, it would be madness in you not to weigh the matter seriously. The young man’s prospects are really very good.”

“You must think what you please of me; but all I can do is to beg Patrick to decline the visits as kindly and civilly as he can.”

And this Blenda did, and was informed that Cousin John, to whom the Commercial Traveller had in the first place applied, had, before his departure, referred him to Patrick, in order that the latter might present his petition to the ladies. And as Patrick would on no consideration undertake to communicate Blenda’s answer, which appeared to him equivalent to a second refusal, it was decided that he should appoint the forenoon, when Blenda would not be at home, for Mr. A.’s visit in Knight-street.

From the subject of lovers, whose numbers

had considerably more effect than her own eyes in convincing Henrietta, that her cousin was really both pretty and attractive, they proceeded to that of music, when it was no less evident that Blenda’s singing and playing were both superior even to Henrietta’s. The latter, of course, did not admit this in so many words, but she said with a gracious smile,

“Now, indeed, you are a companion that any accomplished woman might be glad of. We are *real* relations now. . . . Come and see me as often as you like, and the oftener the better. . . . And listen—do contrive to be a Baroness—it might not be impossible to convert the Baron’s admiration into a serious attachment; so I advise you to make the best use of your influence—things no less extraordinary—though I grant you this would be very extraordinary—have occurred before.”

“Oh! more extraordinary things still have come to pass,” said Blenda, with a light mocking smile. She could not help thinking how astonished Henrietta would be. . . .

When she reached home, it may readily be conjectured that mother and daughter had matter enough to keep them in eager conversation until far into the night.

“It really is astonishing,” said Madame von Kühlen for the twentieth time, “that even that good Mrs. Gyllenhake should endeavour to throw dust in your eyes; but, thank God, a firm faith never deceives us.”

Blenda was still of the same opinion.

As it was considered certain that Mr. A. would not fail to make his appearance the next morning, it was decided that Madame von Kühlen should give him a definitive refusal, while Blenda should undertake the delicate task of dismissing the young Brother of Mercy.

“Thank God!” murmured the good woman, as she lay down to sleep. “Thank God, your future husband will be able to say that his Countess had no lack of suitors, and I hope he will appreciate that distinction as he ought.”

“But, above all, I hope that he already appreciates my firmness in rejecting them; for he will not come forward until he is convinced that there is no one else to stand in his way, and until he does so I cannot be a Countess.”

CHAPTER XXXV.

A PAINFUL INTERVIEW.

It was about one o’clock on the following day, that Blenda went out to seek the last of those interviews which she had looked upon as so innocent, and which she now viewed in such a different light, although they were in fact quite as innocent as before.

She, however, saw no symptoms of the Baron where she expected to meet him, nor in one of the two places which he knew that she would visit.

This did not please Blenda. An inward voice, indeed, whispered to her, that the best thing would be that he should have been offended, and should thus draw back of his own accord: but then another, and a much more flattering one, replied, "It is not very likely that he should give up what he considers a privilege . . . And," added she, "it would be very disagreeable if it were not *I* who should show the example of drawing back—I cannot say I should be gratified at receiving such a lesson from *him*."

It was amid such conflicting feelings, that the young Sister of Mercy paid her visits to her patients.

She felt proud and happy in being privileged to do good with the money of her future husband. She did not, however, confer her benefits with reckless liberality, but with moderation and prudence, for she wished that they should be extended to many, and had been poor enough herself to know how much can be done with a very little. Moreover, she had learnt several useful and simple recipes from her mother, during their residence in the country, which made her a really valuable sick nurse, and were all the more efficacious for the goodwill with which she prescribed or prepared for them.

An old lame woman was Blenda's special favourite, partly because she reminded her so much of her old acquaintance Britta, who never failed to send her young lady the most affectionate and grateful messages in the minister's letters—and with her Blenda remained longer than anywhere else, the time passing quickly away while she listened to the old woman's account of a visit she had received the preceding day from a young gentleman, who looked very melancholy, went to the door and came back several times, and at length gave her a whole six-dollar.

It was with an indescribable feeling of disappointment, that Blenda at length got up to go. She was dissatisfied with herself for having waited for one for whom she knew she ought not to wait, and still she lingered in bidding adieu to her favourite.

At length she turned homeward; but she had not proceeded many yards before she heard approaching footsteps, and a familiar voice addressing her in tones of undisguised delight.

"Oh, Mademoiselle von Kühlen, you are come at last! I waited for you in vain yesterday; and to-day I came too early."

"Too early?"

"Yes, I have been here a long while, and have had time to pay several visits. I have found an object worthy of our attention—a case which we will investigate more narrowly to-morrow, as I see you are now on your way home."

"Where is it that you have been, Baron?" asked Blenda, feeling grieved, though against her will, at the necessity of inflicting upon

her companion—who had not withdrawn himself from her—the painful intelligence, that there would be no morrow for their united exertions.

"I did not look at the number," replied he "but the impression made upon me by the wretchedness of its inhabitants, would not suffer me to forget the house."

"Are they so very miserable?"

"Nothing can well be more so. Picture to yourself a mother with a new-born infant, surrounded by five or six other children, ragged, shivering, and famished; a husband disabled from work by an injured arm, and no one to afford them any assistance beyond that which pity may induce one or other of their neighbours to bestow."

"Let us turn back," exclaimed Blenda, eagerly; "you must show me the house."

"You may set your mind at ease. Have I not learnt from you how to secure a welcome in the dwellings of the poor? They are relieved for the moment from pressing want, and I have engaged an old woman to wait upon them."

"Baron, you have a noble, generous heart, and have acted nobly; but—but . . ."

"To-morrow you shall judge for yourself."

"But to-morrow—to-morrow—I had better speak out plainly, and at once; we cannot go together to-morrow."

"Why not?"

Blenda was silent, deliberating what she should answer.

"Then to-morrow you will again be prevented from coming?"

"Not exactly that; but . . ."

"But—but what?" asked the Baron, his cheek crimsoned by the apprehension that some adverse fate was about to deprive him of a happiness which, though in former days it would only have excited ridicule, now constituted the chief object of his existence, for his love gained strength with every day.

"My attention has been called to the fact, that in spite of the purity of our motives, our meetings are not consistent with propriety."

"And would you really heed such idle scruples when these very meetings are the means of affording relief to so many of our fellow-creatures who need our help? Will not Heaven look down approvingly upon two young people who seek only to obey its dictates?"

"I trust our conduct may be right in the eyes of Heaven,—but it is wrong, very wrong, in the eyes of men."

"And therefore—?"

"Therefore each of us must do his share of good alone."

"To satisfy those who delight in finding fault?"

"No, to preserve my reputation from injury."

The young man was silent, but his colour went and came rapidly, and his agitation increased with every moment.

"I am sure, Baron, you cannot wish me to defy the censure of others, now that I have been warned. It is not fitting for a young

girl like me to be indifferent to public opinion. I may go wrong ignorantly, but never intentionally."

"Then I am to understand that you regret, perhaps condemn, those past hours which have been the happiest of my life?"

"Oh no, indeed, I do not."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite sure; I will even acknowledge—for I do not see why I should deny it—that they have had an interest and a charm for me also. The time passed very quickly during our consultations. But if henceforward I were to suffer this intercourse to continue, I should repent it, for I should then be doing wrong knowingly."

There was a flash in the Baron's eyes as he listened to her words, which revealed to Blenda that he had derived some hope from her reply.

"You are right, Mademoiselle von Kühlen," said he, in a tone of such respectful tenderness, that it would doubtless have found its way to Blenda's heart had it been less effectually guarded, "you are right, and it is I who have done wrong in exposing you to such a risk; but there is nothing which may not be repaired . . ."

He broke off hastily, as if he feared to give utterance to his feelings, and continued in a calmer tone,—

"I shall leave Stockholm for a few months, perhaps for a still longer time; but when I return I shall seek you once more, and then . . ."

There was a still longer pause; the silence was embarrassing to them both.

"But wherever you may be," said Blenda at length, "I am sure you will not forget those who have profited by our meetings; it would grieve me very much could I think so."

"Do not think it; if you did you would be unjust, not only to me, but to yourself also."

"A thousand thanks; and now I must go home."

She was silent, for there was nothing more to be said by either.

"Farewell, then, Mademoiselle von Kühlen, dearest Mademoiselle von Kühlen! I shall carry away with me my recollections, and," added he, in a whisper, which his agitation rendered almost inaudible, "they will not fail to bring me back again!"

* * * * *

Thus Blenda was delivered from all her admirers, for during her interview with the Baron, Madame Von Kühlen had had time to dispose of the addresses of the Commercial Traveller, for when Mr. A. informed her that the sight of her daughter at the theatre had so rekindled his love for her, that after a struggle of several months, he could not refrain from renewing his offer, she requited his confidence in kind.

She imparted to him, under the seal of the profoundest secrecy, that her daughter was already as good as engaged, and that her heart had already been bestowed before she

had been honoured by Mr. A.'s first proposal. And these disclosures had not only the good effect of rapidly healing the wounds of the rejected suitor, but also of rendering the second refusal far easier to bear than the first.

* * * * *

During the species of interregnum which ensued, it was really fortunate for our little heroine to have the society of her cousin Henrietta to fall back upon, in the absence of all other excitement.

Even Madame von Kühlen was occasionally honoured with an invitation to drink coffee with her niece, and when she was seated at Boston with Patrick, Deborah, and another old relation, she was almost as happy in the hours which she spent with her knitting and the romances of La Fontaine . . . for, of course, no sooner had her prospects begun to brighten than she became a subscriber to a circulating library in Stockholm.

Next to this her greatest pleasure was in thinking how soon it would lie in her power to reward her relations for their kindness to her; when she would be able, in her daughter's name, to invite Patrick and Henrietta to the Countess's select soirées.

While matters went on thus pleasantly, Mr. John Blücher, the hat-dresser, remained absent. Patrick constantly spoke of him, and as constantly expressed his impatience for his return; and Blenda now no longer shrank from the idea of meeting her cousin; the knowledge that his affections were already disposed of had dispelled all her shyness.

But time went on, and neither the Baron, nor Cousin John, nor the Count, reappeared on the scene, and not a line, not a token of remembrance did Blenda receive from the latter.

The little note which had been wound round the bouquet meanwhile supplied her with matter sufficient to occupy her thoughts, not on account of its contents, but because, when she subsequently compared the handwriting with that on the paper which had contained the books, she discovered, to her astonishment, that they bore no sort of resemblance to each other.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE PLOT THICKENS.

WHITSUNDAY was drawing near.

Mr. and Mrs. Patrick had already taken up their abode in the country, and Madame von Kühlen and Blenda had been invited to spend Whitsunday at Henrickslund, where John—now about to return to Stockholm—was likewise expected.

A few days before this period, Blenda was sitting working at the flounces of a pink muslin gown, which she meant to display in

the country, when Patrick entered, with a face of unusual importance.

"What is the matter?" exclaimed both the ladies in a breath.

"Aha!" cried Patrick laughing, "so you see that there is something in the wind! Well, I will not attempt to deny it, nor yet that it is something of first-rate importance."

"First-rate importance," murmured Madame von Kühlen to herself. "Oh! if we should have reached our haven at last!"

"Upon my honour," continued Patrick, "I have become quite an important personage, since I have been applied to by one suitor after another for my little cousin's hand."

"What!" whispered Blenda, "another proposal?"

"Yes—positively! and more than that, a proposal which the proudest of our merchants' daughters would look upon as the highest honour. This time you will not return a refusal, that is certain. We shall be nothing and nobody by the side of our noble cousin."

Blenda's agitation was too great for speech; but Madame von Kühlen rose, and placing herself before Patrick, replied with the most impressive dignity—

"Your news, my dear Cousin, does not find us unprepared. Be assured, however, that although the immensely wealthy Scanian nobles are accounted the proudest in the land, yet we shall not fail to contrive that my son-in-law, the Count, should find means to unite his two families in one."

"Devil take me!" exclaimed Patrick in amazement, "if I understand one word of all that you have said! The suitor comes from East Gothland, and not from Scania, and is no count, but only a Baron—and more than enough too, I should think! especially as, though he is not 'immensely wealthy,' he is at any rate the proprietor of an entailed estate, which confers upon him the dignity of a magnate. . . . Here is a letter to Blenda, which was enclosed in mine!"

The expression of disappointment on the countenance of the two ladies was so obvious, that even Patrick, who was not remarkable for penetration—burst into a loud fit of laughter at the trick which they had played themselves.

But Patrick's laughter sufficed to recal them to their senses. Blenda took the letter, and her mother recovered herself sufficiently to reply—

"The amiable and estimable Baron does my daughter great honour by his proposal, yet I almost fear that he will meet with no better success than the Commercial Traveller."

"The deuce he will not! . . . in short, Aunt, you are resolved to wait for a count as your son-in-law."

"I wait for what it may please God to send, my dear nephew. The Baron has not succeeded in gaining Blenda's heart."

"Meanwhile, allow me to advise, as I am sure my poor mother would have done, that you should take time to consider the matter in a rational point of view. The offer is so

far beyond anything that Blenda could have a right to expect, that it would be downright madness to let it slip through your fingers."

"Slip through our fingers?"

"Yes, I mean what I say. And when you come to us on Whitsunday to Henrickslund, Blenda can write the answer from thence. I think, when you have had time to reflect, and to talk over the matter with Henrietta, she cannot fail to return a favourable reply. And now I will leave you to yourselves. We shall meet the day after to-morrow."

* * * * *

"I am very sorry we should have betrayed ourselves; but still, nothing could be more natural," said Madame von Kühlen, so soon as Patrick was out of hearing. "But, my goodness!" continued she, looking at her daughter, who had meanwhile opened and read the Baron's letter . . . child, you are crying . . . Speak, my dear! Perhaps you really are inclined to think better of it, as Patrick said;—and really the Count does delay very long."

"He may delay as long as he pleases: he will be sure to come at last! and never will I wrong him even by a thought of doubt."

"But what does the Baron write? At any rate, it is now clear that you could be a baroness, if you chose; it is indeed the *least* that I expected; but still it is unquestionably high rank, which, when combined with wealth, gives a very important position."

"I will not think of it even for a moment."

"But I think it is my duty as a mother to remind you that the Count's family may, by their intrigues, defer your union for many years, and perhaps eventually break it off altogether, especially as there is no *positive* engagement . . . For my part, the Count's repeated assurances that you were quite free never altogether pleased me; for I think he meant thus to give you a hint that there are obstacles in the way which may possibly prove insurmountable, and that you must not be quite unprepared for such an event."

"Oh, mother, do you too fail me? Whom have I then to depend upon? . . . Even Aunt Gyllenhake has heard nothing of him since March, when I met him at her house—at least, so she says."

"My dear child, I do not fail you. . . . But I should like to read the letter before I say anything more."

Madame von Kühlen looked with reverence at the handsome coat of arms which she might see emblazoned upon every article belonging to her daughter, from her carriage to her table-linen, to remind her of her happiness in being the mother of so great a lady, and then read as follows:—

"DEAREST MADEMOISELLE BLENDA,

"Were I to relate the whole history of my love, how it has gradually been converted from the dream of an idle hour into a strong, deep, earnest feeling, this letter would swell to the dimensions of a romance.

"But who is not acquainted with the romance of the heart, which, with all its varia-

tions, is the same now that it has been from the beginning of the world, and will be to the end of time!

"After our meeting at Christmas, I was surprised at the vehemence of my own feelings; but I did not then come to a decision. You drove me from you, and I obeyed, because I was unwilling to disturb your peace; but I could not obey you long. Then a new era began. My passion increased in fervour; I worshipped you as a saint—an angel, and believed that I grew better and nobler as I visited with you the abodes of misery; assuredly you were my good angel. But even with these better feelings, selfishness was combined, and my chief thought was of my own daily hour of happiness, until the bitter moment came in which you again banished me from your presence.

"Even then, I was on the point of opening my whole heart to you; but such a declaration, at such a moment, appeared to me to be incompatible with delicacy. I therefore controlled my own feelings, in order that we might both have time to convince ourselves of the lasting character of the influence which you exercise over me. I left Stockholm, in order the better to test my own feelings; and the result of this probation is, that I implore you to recal me—recal me as one who is yours, and yours only; one who has a recognised right to accompany you at all times, to dedicate his whole life to you!

"In order to lay this my entreaty before you in due form, I have had recourse to your cousin, Mr. Thorman, the linendraper, whom I entreat to plead my cause with your excellent mother; but with yourself I seek no mediator.

"I am waiting—with what impatience I cannot express—for your answer. Write, write at once—but no—no; pause and consider.

"Not long ago, while travelling, I met your other cousin, the hat-dresser. He made a most agreeable impression upon me; and if I only pleased him half so well, I am persuaded that he will speak in my favour. I informed him of the step I was about to take; but—why, I know not—he refused to be my ambassador. . . ."

Here the letter ended, with the most courteous greetings to Madame von Kühlen, who was referred for details of business to the Baron's letter to Patrick.

The mother shed tears of pride and tenderness.

At length the end so long wished for was obtained! it was no longer a mere admiration, but a formal proposal which her daughter had received from a wealthy Baron, whose name and rank were shrouded in no cloak of mystery. The poor woman's heart throbbed with triumph, and it was lucky for Henrietta that she had already made peace with Aunt Emerentia, for, kind as she was, it would have been no easy matter to conciliate her when once she was able to say,—My son-in-law, the Baron.

Her first words, after reading the letter, were to complain of "that foolish Patrick," for being in such a hurry to run away, instead of showing her the Baron's letter, and speaking to her as he had desired.

"Well, well," she muttered to herself, "I suppose he was provoked because we merely took the matter into consideration."

"But we did not take the matter into consideration, Mamma!"

"Well, then, we will do so now."

"No, indeed, we will not. When I get to Henrickslund, I will write him the kindest letter I can, and tell him as much as I may venture to do of the reason for my refusal, which, I must say, costs me more pain than perhaps it ought.

Blenda was interrupted by a ring at the bell, and hastened to open the door.

She returned, breathless with agitation, holding in her hand another letter, the direction of which was in the same handwriting as the Count's note.

"Well, upon my word! it never rains but it pours!" exclaimed Madame von Kühlen. "Make haste, child, I am dying of impatience. . . . are the Count's arms on the seal?"

"No, there is nothing but a wafer."

"No matter: we shall see enough of the coronet when the time comes."

Blenda opened her letter with trembling fingers, and although at first all the characters seemed to dance before her eyes, she at length succeeded in deciphering the contents, and read aloud as follows:—

"MY DEAR COUSIN,

"At nine o'clock to-morrow morning, a carriage will stop at the door of No. —, Knight-street, to call for Cousin Blenda and her mother,—if they will do me the favour of accepting this invitation,—and convey them to spend Whitsuntide in the country, on a party of pleasure.

"I shall have the honour of joining them at a suitable place on the road.

"In the cherished, though, perhaps, too presumptuous hope of obtaining their consent to this arrangement, I venture not to ask for an answer.

"JOHN."

While the delighted Blenda pressed the letter to her lips, Madame von Kühlen, as usual, talked and reasoned with herself.

"My respected grandmother, who had seen the world, certainly was always right. 'Good fortune seldom comes alone,' she used to say. How very lucky that all should come to pass just in the nick of time! for now there can be no doubt that the declaration will be made in earnest. It is true that the Baron was first in the field, but he can never know that the Count's proposal did not come before his; and if the alliance with the Count does not prove altogether satisfactory—that is, if there are obstacles in the way—we shall still have the Baron to fall back upon. Thus, in the course of a few hours, it will be decided whether my daughter is to be a Countess or Baroness: there is

no other alternative. Oh, indeed, I ought to bless my good fortune; for it has not deceived me even in my most brilliant dreams."

"Of course, our going to Henrickslund is out of the question; is it not, Mamma? We could not think of it now!" exclaimed Blenda at length, as she danced about the room half wild with joy.

"Of course it is, my dear; and they cannot possibly be offended with us when they learn they reason. . . . I hope the Count will have no objection to call upon our worthy relations with his bride."

This point being settled, Blenda returned to her frounces, and began stitching away as if for her life, while her thoughts dwelt upon the mysterious journey.

What could be its object? Blenda was lost in conjecture.

Could it be to present her to his relations? Had the proud and haughty family condescended to give their consent at last?

Could it be a secret marriage in some remote chapel? No, no; such things only took place in romances of the olden time.

Or an elopement? . . . They were to be found occasionally in English novels, but, unluckily, there was no Gretna-Green in Sweden.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

CASTLES IN THE AIR.

WITH the assistance of the worthy little dressmaker, who had aided in the manufacture of the memorable *peignoir*, Blenda's dress was ready in very good time; and as the said dressmaker and the charwoman accompanied our two delighted friends down to the street, where a handsome carriage was waiting for them at the appointed hour, Blenda said to the former, and her mother to the latter, in almost the same words,—

"Thank God, we shall soon be in a position to requite your kindness."

Never had Blenda's beauty appeared so radiant—never had life seemed to her so bright. In her eyes this earth was a paradise.

"Oh," said she to her mother, as the carriage rolled on, "is it possible even to imagine a situation of greater interest?"

Madame von Kühlen replied by turning up her eyes in an expressive manner.

"We have not the least idea," continued Blenda, "whither we are going; for Heaven forbid that we should put any questions to the driver. That he wears no livery, proves that he is himself a species of mystery. The object of our journey is of great importance; we know not what it is! We are to meet a knight with a closed vizor; but, when we part, he will no longer be the enigma which he believes himself to be in our eyes. . . . Positively,

Mamma, at this moment I am tempted to wish that I had known nothing of his high rank; for now he cannot give us the surprise to which he looks forward when he reveals it to us."

"Yes; . . . very likely, indeed, we should have been to meet with such adventures, if we had remained down there in the country! . . . Ours have really been as romantic as possible; and we ought to think of furnishing them to a clever author to make a novel of. Oh, an idea strikes me! I will persuade my future son-in-law, as soon as you are married, to introduce us to the accomplished author of the 'Flower of the Kinnekulle'—his name is Mellin, I think; he would do it beautifully."

"That would be a brilliant idea, dear Mamma . . . if our names could be suppressed, and I were not required to sit to him," replied Blenda laughing.

"Well, we can talk about that afterwards. But to return to what you were saying. . . . You would be quite wrong to wish that you had never known the Count's high rank; for none of these adventures would have come to pass but for that knowledge. . . . you never could have fallen in love with a man of whose station you were ignorant; that would have been far too rash a proceeding."

The time passed rapidly away amidst such discourse, and they had driven about three miles Swedish, when, just as the ladies were expressing, for the twentieth time at least, their conviction that they must very soon be joined by the Count, the carriage suddenly stood still.

"Why do you stop here?" asked Madame von Kühlen of the driver; "we have but just changed horses, and here there is nothing—not even a house, or . . ."

"But there is a very pretty wood close by, where a breakfast in the open air might not be unwelcome!" cried a joyous voice; and a young man approached, whose handsome face and animated eyes expressed unqualified pleasure.

"Cousin John! Cousin John!" cried Blenda: "ah, now indeed you do not look so gloomy as when I saw you last . . ."

More she could not say, for at that moment Cousin John lifted her from the carriage, and she felt that his heart beat as fast as her own. Madame von Kühlen, who had meanwhile got out on the other side, stood curtsying down to the ground before the Count.

She had a vague notion, compounded of hope and fear, that the whole of this overwhelmingly illustrious family might be lying in ambush somewhere in the wood, and trembled lest she might appear deficient in respect, should they indeed have done her the honour of coming to meet her.

Cousin John was far from guessing the extreme importance which his respected aunt attached to this repast, and said smiling,— "As it will be rather late before we can have dinner, I thought I might invite you to partake of a little *déjeuner sur l'herbe*; what I would suggest, if I may, is, that we should hold ourselves quite free to stop where we please, and

as long as we please; for do you not agree with me that excursions of that kind are always the most enjoyable?"

"Oh yes, nothing can be more delightful, or more poetical!" exclaimed Blenda, as she glided along like a sylph, or a wood-nymph, over the soft green turf; "I only wish I had got a pair of castanets, and then I could fancy myself Queen of the Gypsies; and you, Cousin, are quite dark enough to pass for the King."

"Indeed! then it would be to my wife that I should have the honour of offering my arm!"

"Do you not know that there are such things as unmarried queens?"

"I certainly should not have thought so, when a king shares their throne."

"Ah—then now you see the danger of talking of what you do not know; gypsies have peculiar laws and customs of their own. . . . But do you know, Cousin John, that you have been invisible a very long time?"

"Too long a time?"

"Yes—I might add that."

"My absence brought its own punishment with it; but sorceress as you are, I do not think you know the meaning of the word *longing*."

"Do I not?"

"And fear?"

"Aha!"

"And doubt?"

"No, that I do not know, for I have never doubted."

"Do you know, Cousin Blenda, that you are quite an angel!"

Madame von Kühlen, who habitually listened so eagerly when the Count paid his court to her daughter, was now satisfied to ponder as she went, over his proposals for their enjoyment.

Of course it must be a mere jest to conceal the truth; and heaven knows why she fancied that she should soon hear a strain of exquisite music, which was to be the prelude to a series of the most magical surprises.

But, alas! all her castles in the air were destined to be overthrown. At the end of about ten minutes' walk, they reached a delightful grove of young birch-trees, in the midst of which a collation was spread upon the green turf, presenting every possible attraction, except that most important one of all—other guests besides themselves.

Madame von Kühlen heaved a sigh of disappointment. She was not prepared for this.

"Ah!" said she to herself, "those haughty magnates still resist! But let them wait until they have seen my daughter; she will wreak her own vengeance for their coldness, by stealing away all their hearts—there is justice in Heaven!" And as she said this to herself, her features and gestures were as expressive as if she had been acting a pantomime, in which an indignant mother appeals to the powers of Heaven and earth, to soften the feelings of the barbarian upon whom the fate of her child depends.

As for the young people, they were so occupied with each other, that they could neither see nor think of anything else; and this was

a fortunate thing for Madame von Kühlen, for, in the first place, it gave her time to recover herself, and then the opportunity to give the Count a lesson—but of course with the utmost delicacy—that it did not become him to be heedless and forgetful, in the company of a lady who had so much knowledge of the world, and of good manners, as herself; . . . besides which, God's blessings should not be wasted, and it would be a sin and a shame not to eat when there was so much to tempt the appetite.

The admonition to the Count was, however, not so easy to give; for when people are in love, they are apt both to listen and to answer quite at random. So when Madame von Kühlen was tired of waiting and admonishing in vain, she sat down alone to partake of the good cheer, and condescended even to pour out for herself the blood-red wine which glittered so brightly in the crystal decanter, and the gilt goblet from which she drank. Now, whether it were the inspiring effect of the wine, or merely that of the good woman's naturally sanguine temperament, she was suddenly struck by a new and bright idea.

"How silly I was to suppose that the *dénouement* was to take place here at the very first halting-place! Of course he will wish to be further from Stockholm, and to lengthen the suspense as long as possible in order to add to the brilliancy of the effect."

Madame von Kühlen was quite touched. She wiped her eyes with her handkerchief, for in imagination she beheld his Excellency the Count's father (for he could bear no less a title than that of Excellency), in a general's uniform covered with Swedish and foreign orders, advancing to meet them with all the politeness of a courtier of the old school, and doing her the honour to kiss her after the fashion of royalty, first on one cheek and then on the other. She likewise saw the Count's mother seated upon a kind of throne of moss, decorated with fresh garlands, while on her forehead glistened a diadem of family jewels of inestimable value, which she took from her own head and placed upon that of her son's young bride as she knelt at her feet; and the latter speaking as if under the influence of inspiration, addressed her in words so noble and full of feeling, that both their Excellencies wept, and their son wept, and all the aunts, uncles, and cousins who were present at the ceremony likewise drew out their pocket-handkerchiefs.

This splendid vision was, however, cut short by the recollection that Blenda had eaten scarcely anything that day, and that therefore her strength might fail her when she had so much need of it. "No," exclaimed she aloud, "never shall it be said that I neglected anything which could sustain her courage at a moment when she will require it all." . . . And with a beseeching glance to her daughter and the Count, she added in a still louder tone, "Blenda, my child, in the name of your father and of your revered grandmother, I entreat, I command you, to eat."

Blenda looked at her with a smile. "Why, Mamma? Is that so very essential?"

"Obey me, my child; I, your mother, see the necessity of it. My dear nephew, will you not join your persuasions to mine? I have experience, and know what is requisite."

"Aunt, I beg you ten thousand pardons. I have been a very uncourteous host;" was Cousin John's reply.

And now began a merry contest between the two young people. Blenda at first would not eat, and when compelled to do so, insisted in her turn that Cousin John should eat up the double portions which she heaped upon his plate.

At length the repast was concluded, and when the coachman and a little servant lad who accompanied the Count had disposed of the remainder, the host and his guests again entered the carriage and continued their journey.

* * * * *

"Now that we are fairly off," said Blenda, who was seated opposite her knight, and amused herself by holding her parasol so that he could catch scarcely a glimpse of her merry face, "now that we are fairly off, I want to talk to you seriously and confidentially."

"Well then, begin, my little Cousin," cried he, forcibly thrusting aside the parasol; "and when you have done," continued he in a whisper, and with a look which suffused her cheeks with crimson, "it will then be my turn."

Blenda stole a glance at her mother, who replied to it by an emphatic *poke* with her elbow. The same thought had struck them both.

"You must know," began our heroine, conquering the modest confusion called forth by the Count's last words, "that I have been urged to ask the advice of my Cousin John, and as there is but *one* Cousin John with whom I am acquainted, it is but natural that I should apply to him."

"He will do his utmost to justify the confidence reposed in him."

"I do not doubt it. The case is this: a young gentleman of my acquaintance has done me the honour to express his approval of me."

"That is rather vague, since it is a well-known fact that many others have done the same."

"Thank you, that is really a gallant and chivalrous answer; but to be yet more candid, the said young gentleman has asked me to become his bride."

"That is making the matter almost too clear."

"I cannot help it. . . . Moreover, as I have already said, he has assured me that Mr. John Blücher, who it seems made a singularly favourable impression upon him, would speak strongly in his favour."

"Ahem! rather a ticklish commission."

"So much the more so, that I suppose it depends upon how far Cousin John was in his turn captivated by the — Baron."

"Oh! So it is a question of becoming a Baroness?"

"Yes, Cousin; do you call that aspiring too high? I assure you I never contemplated anything less."

" . . . And being very rich?"

"That suits my calculations very well too. Wealth bestows so many advantages, and enables its possessors to indulge so many whims."

"And to shine in the so-called great world?"

"Yes, indeed, it is a question of all that. . . I should like very much to be a lady of fashion, and to have one or two servants in livery behind my carriage, and to receive the attentions of my husband's friends—a whole tribe of course of counts and barons; and above all to excite the intense envy of all the other countesses and baronesses; for of course I should not spare my husband's purse when to shine was the object." And Blenda turned her bright eyes on her lover with a smile.

She was persuaded that he would answer her in the same tone, with a reproof for her vanity and coquetry; for the reason which she had of late assigned in her speculations to Mrs. Gyllenhake's perseverance in asserting that the Count was no Count at all, was that, high-minded as he was, he feared that she attached too much importance to the privileges of the aristocracy. Contrary to her expectation, however, he merely replied—

"No doubt all this would suit you very well."

"Am I to take that answer as your advice, Cousin? Am I to understand that you favour the Baron's suit?"

"I begin to be almost inclined to do so. . . But what say you to the matter, Aunt?"

"Why," replied Madame von Kühlen, with the utmost tact, as she thought, "I should prefer him to whom my daughter's heart should most incline, and am confident that her instinct could not mislead her when inducing her to sacrifice the Baron without hesitation."

"From your reply I might be tempted to conclude that you do not think it so essential to Blenda's happiness that she should marry a man of rank."

"Oh, you must not press me too closely."

"What do you mean, Aunt?"

"I again repeat, I shall be satisfied with him who is the choice of her heart. But, my dear Nephew, from her earliest childhood upward I have felt convinced that she would live to be a *real* lady, I mean a lady who might look forward to be presented at court. . . ."

"And dance with his Royal Highness the Crown Prince at the Court balls," interposed Blenda.

"Right, my dear, that is just what I was going to say. . . . But when that day comes I have only one fear. . . ."

"What is that, Mamma?"

"That I may not be able to see anything of it; for perhaps I may faint away from excess of happiness."

A smile, half of sadness, half of pity, parted the lips of Cousin John, as he closely watched the increasing animation of his companions. But the smile faded quickly away, and he gazed at Blenda with an expression of tenderness, as he replied,—

"I beg you to give me until the afternoon to consider my advice; but then I promise that I will not shrink from giving it."

found elsewhere; the merit lay in the perfect combination which produced so harmonious an effect.

"The house does not consist, however, of more than eight or nine rooms," said Cousin John; "and this drawing-room, with the two small rooms adjoining it, could no doubt be easily contained in the saloon of the Baron's magnificent mansion."

"That may be," said Blenda, sinking down with a somewhat coquettish degree of indifference into one of the luxurious arm-chairs; "but I defy it to equal this in the choice of colours, or in the arrangement of the furniture. I am so delighted with this place, that my only regret is that I must leave it."

"Then you have only to remain here, my dear cousin," interrupted Cousin John, his eyes beaming with tenderness, "for the place belongs to me, and you know that I have no dearer wish than to see you installed as its mistress . . . but will you consent to be so? . . . of that I feel a very painful doubt?"

This declaration was made so absolutely without ceremony or preparation, and took them so completely by surprise, that two undefined exclamations, which seemed the echo of each other, burst at the same moment from the lips of both mother and daughter. They were succeeded by a dead silence.

"What?" stammered Blenda at length; "is this really our home?"

There was something so irresistibly fascinating in these words, that Cousin John involuntarily extended his arms to clasp the speaker to his heart, but they dropped at once, as Blenda timidly rose—

"My dear Aunt," said he, turning to Madame von Kühlen, who looked perfectly bewildered, "will you allow me to take Blenda into the next room? I wish to speak to her alone."

Our good lady, whose brilliant visions were returning upon her, and who hoped that all might yet end better than she had anticipated, replied only by a curtsy, and thereupon, without awaiting further permission, the proprietor of the little dwelling opened the door of a small room, fitted up with book shelves, of which the furniture consisted only of a table and a small sofa.

Had Blenda had any attention to spare, she would doubtless have admired the air of repose and coolness of the little room, with the myrtles and heliotropes peeping forth between its green curtains: as it was, however, she could see nothing but that the face of her lover was deadly pale, and his eyes far from expressing the feelings of delight which should have been his at such a moment.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE MYSTERY SOLVED.

"BLENDA," said the young man in a low voice, as he sat down beside her, and gazed

with earnest but subdued tenderness upon her lovely and expressive face. "Blenda, have you indeed not guessed . . . not chosen to guess?"

"I only believed . . ."

"You believed what?"

"That this moment would come, and that when it came—"

"Oh! speak—go on."

"That when it came we should be happy; is not that enough?"

"It would be more than enough, sweet prophetess, if I were sure that you would still feel the same when your knight, whom I cannot help thinking you have invested with I know not what fabulous dignities, comes to stand before you in his true colours, as plain Cousin John. But understand me, I am now speaking of the real Cousin John."

"The hat-dresser!"

"Yes, the hat-dresser."

"What nonsense!" and Blenda burst out laughing. "But surely, it is now time to lay aside this foolish joke. It was very well to carry on our rather romantic intercourse under the *nom de guerre* of Cousin John, but if we are to marry, you must do that under your real name."

"One thing is certain," replied he, with a smile, "that if I marry, I can do so under no other name than the one I have just mentioned."

"Do you mean that you have no other name than Cousin John?"

"Cousin John and John Blücher are from henceforward one and the same person."

The words were spoken with such an accent of unmistakable truth, that Blenda could only stare in amazement at her lover.

"You—you the real Cousin John—the detested Cousin John!"

"Yes, the very same."

"Oh! that is impossible. I say it is impossible—it *must* be impossible!"

"Why impossible?"

"But the Count! the Count!"

"What Count?"

"Good Heavens! He asks *what* Count! . . . Oh, but this is beyond a jest. . . . I have not deserved this . . . indeed I have not."

"But then do pray explain yourself; for I have not the slightest idea what you mean."

Breathless with agitation, Blenda replied, "The rooms next to us in the hotel at Wenersborg were occupied by a Scanian Count C—creutz. I took you for *him* when you came up to me in the street, and asked me whether I had lost my way."

"Oh! now I understand why you asked me whether I were on my way to Scania."

"Yes, yes; be sure I should have asked nothing had I not believed that I knew to whom I was speaking. I had heard that the Count was a young man, with dark hair, and I thought that it was he who had met us as we entered the hotel; I had seen you go into his room, and immediately after I heard a servant tell the Lieutenant whom

he met upon the stairs, that the Count was at home. . . . But these are all proofs too positive to mislead me; you *are* the Count; yes, yes, you *are* the Count, for at that time Cousin John was at Hamburg." And at these last words she laid both hands upon his arm, and looked anxiously into his face.

He freed himself from the grasp of the small white hands, which, at another time, he would so gladly have retained, and said gravely,

"What an unhappy error! What a childish fancy! Because I, who was not even living in the hotel, happened to go into Count C—creutz's room, you conclude that I must of necessity be himself, and cling to this false impression during the whole of our acquaintance. It was to *the Count* that your heart was given, not to the individual, not to Cousin John."

Blenda burst into a flood of tears. "Oh, what a cruel amusement," . . . said she, when she was at length able to speak, "to deceive a poor girl thus! I scarcely know what I am about . . . Cousin John . . . the hat-dresser! . . . Oh, it was a very, very great shame," and again poor Blenda began to sob, like a child that has lost its plaything.

"Let us look into the whole affair a little more closely," said John, persuasively, "and we shall see whether it may not merit a milder judgment."

"I do not see how that can be—but let me hear."

"In the first place, I never pretended to be a Count."

"But I took you for one."

"My dear Blenda, how could I help your having such a lively imagination, and having eyes only for Counts and Barons?"

"Go on."

"I was attracted by your appearance from the first moment that I saw you in the hotel at Wenersborg; and when I learnt from your driver who you were, I determined to find means of addressing you, which I subsequently did, in the full determination of being of use to you."

"But," said Blenda, whose curiosity was beginning to carry the day over tears, which still glittered on her eyelashes, "why was this meeting to be as it were the first chapter of a romance?"

"Why? because you made it so. You referred me to a damsel of the middle ages, and I was but too pleased to become your knight, for I too was infected with the spirit of romance; it is very contagious."

"But the spell would have been broken at once, had you said who you were, as you ought to have done."

"How," replied the ex-Count smiling, "could you expect me to take a step which would have been so mortifying to my vanity? Seriously, however, I should have explained myself at once, or rather I should never have presented myself anonymously, had I not wished to conceal from my mother the fact that I was still in Sweden."

"And why should you have wished to deceive her also?"

"For her own sake; and also partly to escape from a certain degree of tyranny which mingled with her affection."

"How do you mean?"

"I had not felt quite well for some time, and wished to go to some mineral baths; but as I knew that if my mother had the slightest idea that I was poorly, she would have moved heaven and earth to get me home again, and never have rested till she had done so, in order that she might nurse me with a tenderness somewhat too despotie, I determined to combine my visit to the baths with a foreign journey, which my business rendered necessary . . ."

"Oh! then, that is why it was so long before you wrote from Hamburg."

"Exactly so; I stayed three weeks at Gustavsberg, and had just reached Wenersborg, on my way to Göteborg, when, happily or unhappily for us, fate threw us in each other's way."

Blenda only replied by a sigh.

"You see, therefore, that I could not well introduce myself by name, for that would have been startling intelligence for you to convey to my mother, and it was much better to put off informing her of the matter until I returned home."

"And when you did it was too late for explanations."

"Unhappily, it was."

There was a long silence, which Blenda was the first to break, without pausing to consider how it was that her feelings had become so much more calm.

"What could induce you," asked she, "to continue the comedy with me, on your return?"

"It was only a few hours after my return, that you met me, as you remember, at the house of an acquaintance; you know I introduced you to him as my cousin."

"That is true; but when we were alone you apologised for having done so."

"You must admit that so public a place as an entrance was scarcely suitable for explanations of such a delicate nature. Besides, you were so agitated that you could scarcely stand, and how could I have ventured to excite you further?"

"But when we were in the carriage?"

"I had fully intended to inform you that your unknown friend was a near relation. I could not then have had the slightest reason for concealing the fact, but can you wonder or blame me so very much, if, under the influence of the feelings called forth by your first exclamation, I wished to give myself up for a few moments to the delightful impression, that my return gave you pleasure, before preparing you for the, as I supposed, no less agreeable surprise which I had in store for you?"

"Agreeable surprise—I think so indeed!" murmured Blenda to herself.

"You must remember that I never imagined that you took me for any other person; I

had not the slightest idea of the vision you had conjured up, to damp my feelings of hope and joy."

"That is very true. I always forget that you could not know."

"Besides, I wished to obtain the whole of your guileless confidence before discovering myself."

"And why so?"

"Because I was so anxious to know what answer you had made to my mother's overtures concerning a marriage with her favourite. As you were not aware that your knight and cousin John, were one and the same person, I was fearfully jealous of myself, and trembled at the idea that my mother might possibly win even the slightest encouragement to my suit."

"But you were soon satisfied that your fears were needless; for, if I remember right, I spoke plainly enough."

"Yes, and so plainly, that, instead of telling you all at once, I resolved to cure you of your disposition to romance, and to punish your pride by winning so much of your affection for the poor hat-dresser that, in spite of your heroic fancies, you would be unable to reject him, when he should venture, not only to give utterance to his feelings, but also to the disagreeable announcement which he would then be compelled to make."

"Nevertheless, the plan was a mischievous one. Yes," replied she, as she rested her head upon her hand, and remained for a few moments absorbed in thought; "I maintain that the plan was both mischievous and foolish."

"On the contrary, it was both good and sensible, since it had your true happiness for its object."

"My true happiness?"

"Yes, for you stood in need of some slight lesson. But you will soon see, dear Blenda, how far he who strove to secure his happiness together with your own, and, in so doing, was harsh enough to consider this blow to your castles in the air as imperatively necessary—how far, I say, he would have been capable of sacrificing himself for you."

"How so?"

"Do you not remember, my dear little Cousin, that I never sought to bind you by any promise, although . . .?"

"Although it would have been very easy for you to do so;—yes, that I admit."

"And, moreover, that I never permitted myself to overstep the strictest limits of the freedom that might be allowed to a relation, nor made the slightest claim to the familiarity which is the privilege of a cousin."

"No, no, you have acted uprightly and nobly in every way! You have but one fault—that of being Cousin John!"

"And since that fault is irremediable, you have in your own hand the remedy against its evil consequences."

"And that is?"

"To look upon your Cousin as no more than a Cousin."

Blenda's cheeks grew crimson, but she pretended not to have heard this last suggestion, and added quickly,—

"Now I understand why you made your appearance so seldom. You were afraid of awakening the suspicions of Henrietta . . . But there are two things which I cannot make out."

"What are they?"

"The direction on the packet of books was in the handwriting of the real Count; for it was afterwards accidentally shown to me on board the steamer. The Lieutenant had got a letter of his . . ."

"Very true—it was Count C—creutz who wrote that direction."

"But how could that be?"

"Very easily. That evening in Wenersborg was spent by several young men together, the Count and I being of the party. You were the subject of conversation; and the Count, who had heard great praises of your beauty, meanwhile sate and scrawled over a whole sheet of paper with your name; but even then—for it was after our interview,—your name was sufficiently dear to me, for this to be in my eyes a desecration. I therefore took possession of the paper unperceived; and when I came home, it occurred to me to use one of these copies of your name as an address on the packet of books, thus avoiding the necessity of writing myself; for had you afterwards seen one of my letters to my mother, you would not have failed to recognize my handwriting."

Blenda shook her head, with a slight gesture of dissatisfaction that all should be so easily explained.

"Now let us proceed to the second thing that you cannot understand; for I am impatient to learn my sentence."

"Well, then, listen. Since you had taken it into your head to cure me by such a shameful trick,—and, to be sure, you have cured me so effectually, that I do not think another romantic idea will ever enter my head—how was it that you could urge Henrietta to ask me to her house? If I had come, which, after all, was very likely, there would have been an end of your secret at once."

"But I knew that you dreaded making the acquaintance of your Cousin John far too much to come. Besides, I did it to lull Henrietta's suspicions once for all. In order, however, to obtain a few days' freedom, I persuaded Patrick to accept an invitation into the country, and suffered myself to be persuaded to go with them."

"Oh yes, I know; that was at Christmas, when we laughed because the impromptu Cousin John was in two places at once."

"Ah!" replied he, with a smile, which reminded her of the scene in the stage-box, "it was enough for me to be in one."

"But you really set out with Patrick?"

"Of course; but I had taken all the necessary precautions beforehand. I began by talking of the anxiety caused me by a failure which I anticipated; and then I was over-

taken on the road by an express messenger, who brought me a letter, which proved not only that my fears had been well founded, but that my presence in Stockholm for a few days was absolutely necessary."

"Really!" cried Blenda, unexpectedly recovering the power of laughing. "It seems to me that the question is, whether *you* are not the person who most deserves to be accused of romantic ideas! But that very thing reminds me of a statement of Henrietta's, namely, that your affections were otherwise engaged, and that it was only your devotion to the memory of your mother which induced you . . ."

"Oh, do not speak of that! Henrietta's is a peculiar case, of which I may, perhaps, have to speak to you hereafter. I was obliged to put her on a wrong scent, in order to secure you from observation on her part."

"Well, then, let us proceed to what you said just now, that . . . that . . . what was it?"

"I do not understand . . ."

"Oh! let me think,—that you would have been capable of . . ."

"Now I guess; I promised to prove to you that I should have been capable of sacrificing myself for you."

"Just so," replied she, colouring; "but what did you mean?"

"I thought you would have understood that, when I reminded you that I had not fettered you by any promise."

"Perhaps I might; but still I should like you to explain yourself more clearly."

"I meant nothing, but that I am resolved to act honourably by you. I knew that your ambition aspired to a position which I had it not in my power to offer you. I also knew that your heart inclined towards me; and, notwithstanding the little disappointment that you would have to endure, I was ready to take advantage of this for my own benefit; but at that time there was no question of anything which could be considered more advantageous for you. Now, on the other hand, a rival has made his appearance on the stage, who offers you, besides his love, all the brilliant advantages which, as my wife, you must dispense with. Now, therefore. . ."

"What!"

"Now, therefore, remember that you are free to choose. The only selfish gratification I have permitted myself, is that of bringing you to this place, which I have lately purchased, and where—dreaming of a happiness which is, perhaps, to be wrested from me by another—I have laboured hard to get everything in readiness for this season, since I knew that the moment in which I discovered myself was that in which my fate must be sealed."

"And you can still doubt whether all your labour has not been in vain?" replied she, in a voice trembling with emotion. "Oh! John, dear John! can you really for one moment believe that, vain, silly, and romantic as I may be, I should be capable of sacrificing

even my affections to the allurements of a title? No, when it can only gratify my ear without affecting my heart, its magic power is gone."

"Blenda, Blenda! do not deceive yourself! Perhaps you need time to ponder your choice."

"These are but mocking words; for if you indeed intended to leave me entire freedom of choice, why did you deprive me of it! Have I the power to choose?" And her beautiful eyes, from which every shadow had disappeared, met his with a glance of tender inquiry.

"Is it indeed so, my Blenda—my darling! And the Baron, the estimable Baron? . . ."

"Must look out for another Baroness. I . . ."

"Go on."

"I am content with my Cousin John, the hat-dresser."

At that moment, while the happy lover for the first time embraced his bride, and claimed from Blenda's lips the confirmation of her promise—at that very moment, had any one been inclined to listen, they might have heard in the adjoining room loud sobs, which were presently succeeded by a heavy fall. The happy couple, however, heard nothing of either the one or the other; for there is a kind of happiness from which deafness appears to be almost inseparable.

CHAPTER XL.

SELF-ABNEGATION.

MADAME VON KÜHLEN had been unable to controul the most natural of all feelings, namely, curiosity, the inheritance of Eve; and, therefore, she had softly crept to the door of the room into which the young people had retired; for how could she have endured not to be the first to hear the important words which were to decide Blenda's destiny, and with it her own?

To describe the feelings of the good lady, when she heard her intended son-in-law utter the name of her nephew, John Blücher, as his only legitimate appellation, is not nearly so difficult a task as might be imagined, since they reduced themselves to the following form—

"Poor child! if she suffers herself to be caught in this snare, and retracts her words—as, of course, she would do, if so absurd a story could possibly be true—she will lose that which is her principal charm in the eyes of this romantic Count—that, namely, of loving him under all circumstances, and in all situations, for himself alone. Heaven grant that she may be on her guard, but, with her limited experience, and at such a moment of agitation, she may be taken by surprise!"

But now followed one proof after another so prosaically convincing, that even the respected grandmother, had she been alive, with

had not the slightest idea of the vision you had conjured up, to damp my feelings of hope and joy."

"That is very true. I always forget that you could not know."

"Besides, I wished to obtain the whole of your guileless confidence before discovering myself."

"And why so?"

"Because I was so anxious to know what answer you had made to my mother's overtures concerning a marriage with her favourite. As you were not aware that your knight and cousin John, were one and the same person, I was fearfully jealous of myself, and trembled at the idea that my mother might possibly win even the slightest encouragement to my suit."

"But you were soon satisfied that your fears were needless; for, if I remember right, I spoke plainly enough."

"Yes, and so plainly, that, instead of telling you all at once, I resolved to cure you of your disposition to romance, and to punish your pride by winning so much of your affection for the poor hat-dresser that, in spite of your heroic fancies, you would be unable to reject him, when he should venture, not only to give utterance to his feelings, but also to the disagreeable announcement which he would then be compelled to make."

"Nevertheless, the plan was a mischievous one. Yes," replied she, as she rested her head upon her hand, and remained for a few moments absorbed in thought; "I maintain that the plan was both mischievous and foolish."

"On the contrary, it was both good and sensible, since it had your true happiness for its object."

"My true happiness?"

"Yes, for you stood in need of some slight lesson. But you will soon see, dear Blenda, how far he who strove to secure his happiness together with your own, and, in so doing, was harsh enough to consider this blow to your castles in the air as imperatively necessary—how far, I say, he would have been capable of sacrificing himself for you."

"How so?"

"Do you not remember, my dear little Cousin, that I never sought to bind you by any promise, although . . .?"

"Although it would have been very easy for you to do so;—yes, that I admit."

"And, moreover, that I never permitted myself to overstep the strictest limits of the freedom that might be allowed to a relation, nor made the slightest claim to the familiarity which is the privilege of a cousin."

"No, no, you have acted uprightly and nobly in every way! You have but one fault—that of being Cousin John!"

"And since that fault is irremediable, you have in your own hand the remedy against its evil consequences."

"And that is?"

"To look upon your Cousin as no more than a Cousin."

Blenda's cheeks grew crimson, but she pretended not to have heard this last suggestion, and added quickly,—

"Now I understand why you made your appearance so seldom. You were afraid of awakening the suspicions of Henrietta . . . But there are two things which I cannot make out."

"What are they?"

"The direction on the packet of books was in the handwriting of the real Count; for it was afterwards accidentally shown to me on board the steamer. The Lieutenant had got a letter of his . . ."

"Very true—it was Count C—creutz who wrote that direction."

"But how could that be?"

"Very easily. That evening in Wenersborg was spent by several young men together, the Count and I being of the party. You were the subject of conversation; and the Count, who had heard great praises of your beauty, meanwhile sate and scrawled over a whole sheet of paper with your name; but even then—for it was after our interview,—your name was sufficiently dear to me, for this to be in my eyes a desecration. I therefore took possession of the paper unperceived; and when I came home, it occurred to me to use one of these copies of your name as an address on the packet of books, thus avoiding the necessity of writing myself; for had you afterwards seen one of my letters to my mother, you would not have failed to recognize my handwriting."

Blenda shook her head, with a slight gesture of dissatisfaction that all should be so easily explained.

"Now let us proceed to the second thing that you cannot understand; for I am impatient to learn my sentence."

"Well, then, listen. Since you had taken it into your head to cure me by such a shameful trick,—and, to be sure, you have cured me so effectually, that I do not think another romantic idea will ever enter my head—how was it that you could urge Henrietta to ask me to her house? If I had come, which, after all, was very likely, there would have been an end of your secret at once."

"But I knew that you dreaded making the acquaintance of your Cousin John far too much to come. Besides, I did it to lull Henrietta's suspicions once for all. In order, however, to obtain a few days' freedom, I persuaded Patrick to accept an invitation into the country, and suffered myself to be persuaded to go with them."

"Oh yes, I know; that was at Christmas, when we laughed because the impromptu Cousin John was in two places at once."

"Ah!" replied he, with a smile, which reminded her of the scene in the stage-box, "it was enough for me to be in one."

"But you really set out with Patrick?"

"Of course; but I had taken all the necessary precautions beforehand. I began by talking of the anxiety caused me by a failure which I anticipated; and then I was over-

taken on the road by an express messenger, who brought me a letter, which proved not only that my fears had been well founded, but that my presence in Stockholm for a few days was absolutely necessary."

"Really!" cried Blenda, unexpectedly recovering the power of laughing. "It seems to me that the question is, whether *you* are not the person who most deserves to be accused of romantic ideas! But that very thing reminds me of a statement of Henrietta's, namely, that your affections were otherwise engaged, and that it was only your devotion to the memory of your mother which induced you . . ."

"Oh, do not speak of that! Henrietta's is a peculiar case, of which I may, perhaps, have to speak to you hereafter. I was obliged to put her on a wrong scent, in order to secure you from observation on her part."

"Well, then, let us proceed to what you said just now, that . . . that . . . what was it?"

"I do not understand . . ."

"Oh! let me think,—that you would have been capable of. . ."

"Now I guess; I promised to prove to you that I should have been capable of sacrificing myself for you."

"Just so," replied she, colouring; "but what did you mean?"

"I thought you would have understood that, when I reminded you that I had not fettered you by any promise."

"Perhaps I might; but still I should like you to explain yourself more clearly."

"I meant nothing, but that I am resolved to act honourably by you. I knew that your ambition aspired to a position which I had it not in my power to offer you. I also knew that your heart inclined towards me; and, notwithstanding the little disappointment that you would have to endure, I was ready to take advantage of this for my own benefit; but at that time there was no question of anything which could be considered more advantageous for you. Now, on the other hand, a rival has made his appearance on the stage, who offers you, besides his love, all the brilliant advantages which, as my wife, you must dispense with. Now, therefore . . ."

"What!"

"Now, therefore, remember that you are free to choose. The only selfish gratification I have permitted myself, is that of bringing you to this place, which I have lately purchased, and where—dreaming of a happiness which is, perhaps, to be wrested from me by another—I have laboured hard to get everything in readiness for this season, since I knew that the moment in which I discovered myself was that in which my fate must be sealed."

"And you can still doubt whether all your labour has not been in vain?" replied she, in a voice trembling with emotion. "Oh! John, dear John! can you really for one moment believe that, vain, silly, and romantic as I may be, I should be capable of sacrificing

even my affections to the allurements of a title? No, when it can only gratify my ear without affecting my heart, its magic power is gone."

"Blenda, Blenda! do not deceive yourself! Perhaps you need time to ponder your choice."

"These are but mocking words; for if you indeed intended to leave me entire freedom of choice, why did you deprive me of it? Have I the power to choose?" And her beautiful eyes, from which every shadow had disappeared, met his with a glance of tender inquiry.

"Is it indeed so, my Blenda—my darling! And the Baron, the estimable Baron? . . ."

"Must look out for another Baroness. I . . ."

"Go on."

"I am content with my Cousin John, the hat-dresser."

At that moment, while the happy lover for the first time embraced his bride, and claimed from Blenda's lips the confirmation of her promise—at that very moment, had any one been inclined to listen, they might have heard in the adjoining room loud sobs, which were presently succeeded by a heavy fall. The happy couple, however, heard nothing of either the one or the other; for there is a kind of happiness from which deafness appears to be almost inseparable.

CHAPTER XL.

SELF-ABNEGATION.

MADAME VON KÜHLEN had been unable to controul the most natural of all feelings, namely, curiosity, the inheritance of Eve; and, therefore, she had softly crept to the door of the room into which the young people had retired; for how could she have endured not to be the first to hear the important words which were to decide Blenda's destiny, and with it her own?

To describe the feelings of the good lady, when she heard her intended son-in-law utter the name of her nephew, John Blücher, as his only legitimate appellation, is not nearly so difficult a task as might be imagined, since they reduced themselves to the following form—

"Poor child! if she suffers herself to be caught in this snare, and retracts her words—as, of course, she would do, if so absurd a story could possibly be true—she will lose that which is her principal charm in the eyes of this romantic Count—that, namely, of loving him under all circumstances, and in all situations, for himself alone. Heaven grant that she may be on her guard, but, with her limited experience, and at such a moment of agitation, she may be taken by surprise!"

But now followed one proof after another so prosaically convincing, that even the respected grandmother, had she been alive, with

all her wisdom and experience of life, would have had no alternative but to acknowledge the force of truth.

Madame von Kühlen turned red and pale by turns, and shook with alternate cold and heat, as in an ague fit, becoming at every alternation more and more convinced that never had so cruel, shameful, and dishonourable a trick been played to two respectable and well-born ladies since the memorable days of mother Eve and the Serpent.

"Ha!" muttered she, as she applied her ear and eye by turns to the keyhole; "ah! unworthy son of a most worthy mother, in whom the last spark of honour is extinct! Unhappy youth, led astray by passion, and rendered criminal by love! for this there can be no forgiveness—none! Heaven be thanked that the Baron is still left to us—he, the type of honour and of worth! Oh, Sister Regina Sophia, forgive me, it cannot be! My daughter must be a Baroness, must rule over the great entailed estate, and receive her guests in a saloon which could contain two such rooms as this."

During the latter part of these reflections, Madame von Kühlen's agitation had increased to a degree which somewhat impeded her powers of hearing; but she now exerted them in earnest, and applying her ear to the keyhole, caught the last decisive sentence from the lips of her own Blenda, which informed her that the Baron must look out for another Baroness, while she would content herself with her cousin, the hat-dresser. And it was at that awful moment that the good lady in the first place burst into a violent fit of sobbing, and secondly, for the first time in her life, fell down in a fainting fit.

How many disappointed hopes!

It was but that very day that Madame von Kühlen had dreamed of fainting away on seeing her daughter dance with the Crown Prince.

* * * * *

A considerable time had elapsed.

The evening was beginning to close in, and the cool breeze, blowing through the windows of the saloon, brought back the hue of life to the pale cheeks of Madame von Kühlen.

She roused herself as if from some painful dream, and looked around, but then closed her eyes again, in the hope that she was still dreaming and should presently awake in her bed; but this delusion could not last long—again she opened her eyes, and perceived but too clearly that she was awake and in her senses.

She rose up with a deep sigh.

"How do matters stand now?" was the question she asked herself; and with the heroic calm of resignation she again gazed into the now silent chamber. And when she beheld the young man, the expression of his countenance deepened by the absorbing happiness which filled his heart, sitting at Blenda's feet and gazing upon her with beaming eyes—when she beheld Blenda herself looking down on him like a being from a higher sphere, her beauty heightened and idealized by the mys-

tery of love—then and more vividly awoke in her heart the remembrance of Regina Sophia—of the cordial affection with which she had received and welcomed her poor and solitary kinswomen, of the kindness she had shown to them, and of the earnest wish which she had expressed, even in her last moments, for the union of her favourite son with her whom she already loved as a daughter.

When once Madame von Kühlen's reflections had reached this point the struggle became easy, for in the good woman's heart there was at least as much of kindness as of weakness and folly.

She sighed indeed when she thought of the Baron, and recollected the entailed estate and the splendid coat of arms—that would indeed have been a noble prize! Yet it was still more delightful to imagine Regina Sophia gazing down from heaven and thanking her sister, her dear Emerentia, for having requited all her benefits a thousand fold by this self-sacrifice.

"Then be it so, in Heaven's name," murmured she to herself, courageously wiping away the last lingering tear: but as she was on the point of opening the door her weakness for a moment regained the upper hand. "Oh," said she, "if I could but have had my way and had her christened Concordia, we should never have made such a failure; she would not merely have had the option of being a baroness, but she would really have become one;—that we failed in this is all the fault of her poor father. However, things have turned out otherwise, and since she looks as if she were happy, we must make the best of it."

She knocked at the door: she would no longer expose herself to temptation . . . and besides—as she was "a great advocate for propriety"—she really could not permit the young people to spend the whole evening alone together.

The above-mentioned signal startled the happy lovers from their dream of bliss.

"Mother!" cried Blenda.

"Aunt Emerentia!" cried John.

Both immediately hastened into the next room, and all the embarrassment of an explanation must now have been encountered, and might perhaps have proved by no means agreeable, if Madame von Kühlen had not at once of her own accord severed the knot.

Fortunately for all parties the good lady could not affect ignorance, and cut short her future son-in-law at his first word by exclaiming:—

"I know all, I have heard all, and for poor Regina Sophia's sake, I must needs be content with the son-in-law whom fate has assigned me."

The form of acceptance was indeed widely different from what it would have been in the case of the Count or the Baron, but such as it was, young Blicher was delighted.

"My good, excellent Aunt," cried he, "your generosity will make me from henceforward the most devoted of sons, and with God's assistance I will make Blenda so happy that she

shall have no time to regret the high rank which might have been hers."

Blenda threw herself into her mother's arms.

"Are you really happy, my child?"

"I am more than happy, I feel as if I were raised above the earth, and yet I belong to it more than ever—since from henceforward I shall have no more need of castles in the air."

"Well, well, my child, that is all as it should be, so at any rate, we may be satisfied with the result of our journey—thank God for it!"

* * * *

It was not until late in the evening, when the ladies retired to the spacious and handsome guest-chamber, which was destined to be Madame von Kühlen's own, that they found the opportunity, which both longed for, to pour out their hearts to each other.

Blenda then assured her mother upon her honour and conscience that she was not making the slightest sacrifice in refusing the Baron, and that her only regret was lest she might add to the pain she could not avoid causing him, by the tidings of her own happiness; a happiness so keenly felt that life now appeared to her worth having, only if passed by the side of John. And on hearing this Madame von Kühlen's warm and sanguine heart recovered at once its lightness and its original lowliness.

The pretty house, so beautifully situated, and so comfortably arranged, naturally excited the admiration of both mother and daughter; and both were delighted to hear that Cousin John meant, the very next autumn, to give up his business to one of his clerks, and retire to his estate, having now amassed a sufficient fortune to live there very comfortably as a country gentleman.

Morning had well nigh dawned before sleep visited the eyes of either of our ladies. Madame von Kühlen, who had been long in bed, kept herself awake by asking Blenda every moment whether she never meant to leave the window; and Blenda, who could not weary of gazing upon her garden, her lake, her alders, and, in short, all that was hers, as constantly replied, "I am coming directly," but never came, until Madame von Kühlen had the sagacity to observe,—

"My goodness! what an object you will be to-morrow! I am certain John will think that the beauty he admired so much to-night was all a dream."

The argument was irresistible; and Blenda turned from the window, after bestowing a parting glance of affection on the flower-beds, the avenues, and the whole property.

consciousness of the new existence which had begun for her; and her first thought, after breathing a heart-felt thanksgiving to the Almighty, was to review her past life, and recal the recollection of all her little follies.

But—not much to the credit of her patience, it must be owned—she had not got half through the list of her weaknesses, before she was very tired of them; and, having despatched the remainder in a lump, with the words, "In short, I have been a very silly child; but now I am a child no longer," she began to dress herself in haste, in order to spend the early morning hours in a more agreeable manner.

Madame von Kühlen was still asleep, whence—that good lady being a species of living clock—Blenda concluded that it must be very early; and that, as Cousin John could not yet be up, she might go down, and, without scruple or restraint, indulge her curiosity with regard to her new abode.

She longed to traverse the rooms alone, to sit down on every sofa, and look at herself in every looking-glass.

It is with a peculiar and inexplicable feeling that those who have never possessed anything feel that they may utter the word "my own."

Blenda's "own" *peignoir* had, of course, not been left behind; and no sooner was it on than, light as the spirit of air, she flew out of the room, down the wide staircase, and into the dining-room, of which the door stood open.

As good luck would have it, there was nobody there, although the breakfast-table, already laid, gave evidence that it could not be so very early as Blenda had fancied.

And now the future mistress of the place began, with an air of great gravity and importance, to inspect her plate and china; and having examined and admired everything to her heart's content, she went on into the ante-room, where she detected a closed door which she had not observed on the preceding evening, and was on the point of opening it, when it suddenly occurred to her that she might go wrong, and, blushing scarlet at the thought, she turned into the saloon; but there she stood still—for the life of her, she could not help it—before the great mirror; and it is uncertain when she would have proceeded any further, had not in it been reflected the opening of the mysterious door in the next room, and the appearance of Cousin John.

On beholding his young bride thus unexpectedly, a joyful exclamation burst from his lips; but Blenda, confused at being thus detected in her inspection, hastened to make her escape; and it was only in the little library where, on the preceding evening, their vows had been interchanged, that he succeeded in overtaking her.

What here passed between them we cannot undertake to relate; we only know that the *tête-à-tête* was speedily interrupted by Madame von Kühlen, who hastened breathless after them.

CHAPTER XLI.

PROPRIETY.

It was a beautiful morning when, on the eve of Whitsunday, our heroine awoke to the

"Goodness! Mamma, think of your being up and dressed already! Why, you were asleep when I left you."

"My child, I woke just as you went out of the room; and, to be frank, I must tell you that I think it would be better for us to avoid Henrietta's observations and criticisms, by making up our minds to return early this morning to Stockholm, and proceeding from thence to Henrickslund."

"But, my dear Aunt, surely such haste is very unnecessary, and shows an exaggerated degree of consideration for Henrietta's opinion. Do not be so pitiless! Will it not be time enough to-morrow?"

"No, my dear son-in-law! I do not say there is anything positively wrong in your seeking opportunities of meeting here; it is all very natural . . ."

"What, Aunt Emerentia!" cried John, smiling; "can there be anything wrong in our wishing each other good-morning? Surely every one may be allowed to do that, but especially two people who are engaged!"

"That is all very true, but I have always been a great stickler for propriety; and, until you are married . . ."

"We must not wish each other good-morning," cried Blenda, throwing her arms round her mother, with a merry glance of mischief.

"No, no; I do not wish to go such lengths, my child; but you ought not to meet thus alone,—it is not proper; and I shall not rest until we find ourselves at Patrick's."

The good lady, however, kept the real secret of her impatience to herself. She was in a fever to find somebody with whom to talk over her great news, and to whom she could recount her generosity in sacrificing an entailed estate and a real live Baron, at the shrine of her departed sister, Regina Sophia.

"Very well," said her son-in-law; "then I shall not rest either, until the banns have been published, and our wedding celebrated; all that can be done in three weeks—can it not, my dear Aunt?"

"Have your wedding when you like, my dear Nephew—only I do not know whether Blenda can be ready quite so soon, and we must think a little about that."

"Yes, that is the thing!" said Blenda, rather hesitatingly. "I shall have to make several things first. . ."

"Oh, that is all nonsense, my darling; you need not make anything, for your trousseau is all ready."

"My trousseau?"

"Yes! did you not yourself deliver all the linen to our old friend, Mrs. Gyllenhake? And as to your gowns and millinery, be sure that they are ready."

"Will they make themselves!" asked Blenda, laughing.

"You will see, my Blenda. I know a clever little dress-maker in Hamburg; and as I am just come from thence . . ."

"Oh John, my dear John, how happy I shall be! Tell me, will there be a little cap for me?"

"What a pet you are!" and he clasped his beautiful little bride in his arms, and stole a kiss from her rosy lips.

"Is that an answer?"

"Wait awhile. I have nothing to give you till the case arrives. . . And you can unpack it here when you make your appearance as a bride; for the wedding shall take place here."

CHAPTER XLII.

GREAT NEWS.

WHILE the events above recorded were taking place in the newly-acquired country house of Mr. John Blücher, Mrs. Patrick Thorman was wandering about her villa, complaining of the unreasonable dilatoriness of Madame von Kühlen and her daughter.

They had promised to make their appearance in good time; but when Patrick arrived at midday nothing had yet been heard of them.

"Nor of John either," said Mr. Thorman; "but concerning him I have heard a piece of news, which he has kept to himself very close."

"What is it?" cried Henrietta; "is he engaged?"

"My stars, what women are!" cried Patrick; "one cannot even mention the word 'news,' but they must immediately think of a wedding. . . But he really has got something worth having, though it is not exactly a wife—"

"What then?"

"A very nice property—that pretty place Swanwik, a few miles from hence—and he has got it on very reasonable terms too, which is the best part of the whole business. But the singular thing is, that he has already repaired and refitted up the whole house."

"Good, kind John! He intends to give us an agreeable surprise—that is doubtless the reason of his secrecy. At any rate, he was right to invest his money in land; that gives a man a position at once. You ought to do the same."

"The deuce I should! The shop gives me more than enough to do. Besides, it is better to receive rent for a good substantial house here in town, than to run the risk of being ruined by the wet or the drought in the country."

"Well, I dare say we shall spend so much of our time with John, that it will not much matter whether the place is his or ours. And since he has no wife, I suppose I shall have to do the honours for him whenever he receives company, for of course, as he has so many friends, he will like to see a great deal of them; and we shall lead a very pleasant life there. I only wish he would make haste and come, and my Aunt and Blenda too!"

"I dare say Blenda is lingering over her letter to the Baron."

"And you say the letter is to contain a refusal?" rejoined Henrietta, in her light mocking tone.

"I do assure you, upon my soul, that the little thing was quite in earnest."

"Ah, much you know of women! But Baroness, or no Baroness, we will not wait a moment longer for dinner."

* * * * *

The dinner hour passed away; so did the afternoon; and Henrietta grew provoked.

When, however, Deborah arrived from Stockholm, bringing with her tidings of the remarkable fact, that the ladies had driven out early the day before in a handsome carriage—which fact was indisputable, being confirmed by many witnesses—Henrietta was so much astonished and puzzled, as to feel almost ill with repressed curiosity.

This, however, was a mere trifle compared with that which was to come.

It is impossible to describe the poor lady's consternation,—not indeed at seeing her three guests arrive toward evening, at one and the same time, for that John should have come by the same boat with them was not so very remarkable;—but when on her advancing to wish Blenda joy of her approaching union with the Baron, John, with the utmost composure, interposed the following words,—

"Wait a moment, my dear sister-in-law, you know nothing yet! It is by no means Baron T—sward who is to carry off the coveted little heroine—it is myself!"

"You! . . . you?"

And Henrietta's cheeks grew as white as the Narcissus flowers which she had woven in her hair.

Fortunately at that moment Patrick joined the group on the verandah, and while he welcomed his aunt, and his cousin whose cheeks had been crimsoned by alarm at Henrietta's sudden and death-like paleness, John found time to whisper to his sister-in-law,—

"Forgive me, Henrietta—the whole affair has been carried on with entire secrecy; I thought that was best. We shall be asked in church for the first time next Sunday. And now do speak to Blenda, she is waiting for you to do so; . . . would you have her guess? . . . she has no suspicion—as yet."

A glance, half of hatred, and half of some widely different feeling, flashed upon John from Henrietta's eyes, and then she turned away to hide a rebellious tear.

When, however, she again looked round, which, to do her justice, was the next moment, she drew near to Blenda, who meanwhile had the tact to devote all her attention to Patrick.

"But my good friends," inquired he, "what on earth makes you all stand here so silent and solemn? you look quite unlike yourselves."

"To be sure!" cried Henrietta, now able to smile once more, for, Heaven be praised, women are always women; "that is the very question that I wanted to ask a minute

ago, and I would lay anything that you can not guess what it all means?"

"No, there you are right, my duckie!"

"Oh! so you see that, you dear old goose!" and a strange smile trembled on Henrietta's lips, as for the first time in her life she addressed to Patrick a word of endearment after his own heart. "Well, they feel a little embarrassed and ashamed of themselves, and with good reason, for they have come to inform us, their nearest relations, almost at the same moment with the public in general, that next Sunday the banns of marriage will be published between—whom do you think?"

"Whom do I think?" and Patrick's astonished gaze rested in succession upon all those present.

"Between—the hat-dresser, Mr. John Blücher, and Mademoiselle Blenda von Kühlen."

"Why, devil take me! this is news with a vengeance! But she is making game of me! Is not she, John? Oh Henrietta, Henrietta!"

"Ask Blenda!"

"Oh, is that it? well, will my little cousin enlighten me?"

"Oh no, on no account. I shall refer you to Mamma."

"How strange you all are! Well, then, Aunt Emerentia; we are old friends, and rational people to boot; we can be serious; so now tell me what there is to tell."

"My dear Nephew, I should be very much tempted to refer you in my turn to the place we have just come from, if it were not so very far off; as matters stand, however, all I can say is, that I beg you to believe Henrietta—she would not jest on such a subject."

"Well, upon my word! and so it is really true! My stars! and you really are engaged, brother John! But I cannot understand how this all came about, since little Blenda never could endure the notion of 'Cousin John,' and moreover, she was waiting for a Count, who stood in the way of the Baron."

"Stop, stop," interposed John, seeing his young bride exposed to all the point-blank fire of Patrick's home questions. "You know it is never worth while to enquire into the meaning of all a woman's whims. The title of Count was a mere *ruse de guerre* to conceal the truth. I have had the toils set for a long time to ensnare my cousin's heart, but it was not until yesterday, when I had carried her and my aunt off into the country, that she would consent to let me finally secure my prize; consequently my engagement is not more than four-and-twenty hours old."

"And it was of course contracted at Swan-wik," said Henrietta. "I beg your pardon, but it is not our fault, if we know more than people see fit to tell us."

"Aha! and I had flattered myself that I should have two pieces of news to tell you at once!"

* * * * *

The wedding was celebrated at Swanwik, at the end of three weeks. Concerning this important event, however, we have not a word to say, excepting that Henrietta, after some melancholy hours spent in one of the guest-chambers, had concluded to excuse herself from the pain of being present at the ceremony, under pretext of indisposition, when a parcel was brought to her from the bridegroom, which produced a magical effect in altering her determination.

The parcel contained a shawl of matchless beauty, a circumstance which might not however have appeared very significant to any one except Henrietta, who was acquainted with its history.

One evening, while John was paying his sister-in-law a visit, three or four shawls had been sent up from a warehouse, in order that he might choose one for his bride. Amongst them was the very shawl now displayed before the eyes of Henrietta, which was exceedingly beautiful, but so dear, that the bridegroom declared with a smile that, much as he admired it, he must nevertheless give the preference to one of the others, which, though also very handsome, was by no means comparable to this.

"Yes," said Henrietta, wrapping herself in the soft Indian tissue, "as Blenda has not seen this one, she will be sure to admire the other one very much; but I never in my life saw a shawl so beautiful as this."

The reader may therefore imagine how much Mrs. Patrick was flattered and gratified by this attention on the part of her brother-in-law. The shawl presented to her was half as dear again as that which he had chosen for his bride.

Henrietta, being thus completely conquered, began to dress; for upon reflection she came to the conclusion that she owed it to herself and to her poor Patrick not to die of despair.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE COUNT HIMSELF.

THE romantic history of Mademoiselle Blenda's adventures in search of happiness might well end here, seeing that the goal is attained; but as on the very day after that on which she became Mrs. John Blücher a little surprise was in store for her, we shall beg leave to add a chapter of her married life as a postscript.

It was about nine in the morning, and neither the bride nor any of the guests invited to the wedding had as yet made their appearance; but the bridegroom was up, and in full activity, knocking, now at the door of his mother-in-law, in order to exchange a word or two with her, and now at that of Mrs. Gyllenhake, (who was to pay a visit of a few weeks to the young couple,) to ask the advice of his esteemed old friend on some important point.

At length there was a sound of life in the passages, and the guests began to open their doors. John thought he might now enquire whether his wife were dressed, and with a beating heart he approached the very door past which Blenda had once hurried so hastily.

"May I come in?"

A low, timid "yes" was the reply; and the next moment John was by the side of his blushing and beautiful bride.

And very beautiful and very fascinating did Blenda look.

It was now no longer a question of the modest *peignoir*, which had done so much service in the preceding weeks as to have assuredly seen its best days; the large wardrobe now contained many a captivating morning dress, and Blenda had spared no pains to appear to the best advantage.

"Do you approve?" asked she of her husband, with a smile, as she inserted the last pin.

"Yes—and so much, that my only doubt is whether I ought ever to let you out. How lovely you are! and how I love you!" and indeed it seemed as if he could never weary of gazing at her.

"Yes, and how selfish you are into the bargain, to wish to shut me up! But never fear: I shall find means of letting myself be seen."

"Do not be so unmerciful with your confidences, or perhaps I may be tempted to keep to myself one which I was about to make to you."

"Aha! a confidential communication! I am so curious to hear it."

"Wait a minute: we must first wish each other good morning. No one can object to our doing that now."

"There, there, that will do—you are tumbling my collar and my cap. And now what is this confidential communication?"

"What should you say to enacting hostess to-day at a large dinner-party?"

"Do you mean that many guests are coming?—and I who have never done the honours before!"

"Does that disturb you?"

"Oh, no; I dare say I shall manage to get through it. But who will arrange about the dinner? You know I do not understand that sort of thing at all."

"Oh, there are plenty of people to attend to that, and first of all your husband. But besides the dinner, there is a ball in prospect for this evening."

"A ball! oh, how delightful! I remember so well how I enjoyed the ball at the gymnasium at Skara. . . . And I can dance pretty tolerably too—look here!"

And thereupon Blenda went through a little rehearsal of her powers, with such effect as to obtain her husband's assurance that her genius in that line was only too evident.

"Yes, I have no objection to confess that I have lately taken a few lessons, under the impression that young Mrs. Blücher might occasionally have an opportunity of dancing a little."

"Very good! In that case I have only one

word to add: prepare yourself not to display too much excitement or interest when you hear a certain name, which shall for the present be nameless."

"A certain name! who *can* you be expecting?"

"That is my secret."

"What! a secret already?"

John nodded his head, smiling.

"And you think I will suffer you to keep it?"

"I hope so."

"Aha! you only *hope* so . . . that answer, which betrays a certain degree of weakness, quite disarms me. If you had said, I *will* keep it, then . . ."

"Well, if I had presumed so far, what then?"

"You should have seen what would have happened."

"But you really drive me to say that I *will* keep it!"

"And I say, keep it if you can!" and with the most bewitching coquetry, Blenda threw herself on her knees, and plied him with entreaties and caresses, until, fairly conquered, John exclaimed—

"Spare me, spare me! I surrender, and cry you mercy for my secret."

"Come, that is a very proper and reasonable manner of speaking—and you may keep it."

"In return, I will give you a piece of advice, little sorceress: do not make yourself too beautiful for dinner."

* * * * *

No one, however, can for a moment suppose that Blenda would follow this advice. She felt as if she had scarcely time to eat her breakfast with the rest of the party, to receive their good wishes, or even to blush at the not very refined jests of Patrick, so occupied was she with the idea of her toilet. Occasionally, however, some other thought would flit through her head; and then she would run out into drawing-room, dining-room, or store-room, where her mother, Mrs. Gyllenhake, and Henrietta were all busily employed.

"Can I help you? can I be of any use? shall I stay here?" asked she, repeatedly, as she picked her way amongst piles of china, baskets of bottles, and such like things.

"Go back to your room, my child!" cried Madame von Kühlen, from the top of a step-ladder, which was placed against the upper shelf of a tall cabinet with glass doors; "you can learn nothing to-day."

"Yes, go, my love," said Mrs. Gyllenhake, from the arm-chair, whence she presided over the operation of laying the table.

"Do go away!" exclaimed Henrietta; "you will upset my vases of flowers, which I have had so much trouble in arranging."

Blenda was just debating whether she should not make an incursion into the kitchen, or visit Mrs. Deborah, when John appeared, took his little wife by the arm, and led her back to her own room; but she soon effected her escape from him; for she had not yet arranged her head-dress to her satisfaction.

* * * * *

The dinner hour at length arrived.

Blenda made her appearance in the drawing-room, attired in a gown of lilac silk, and a coiffure of pink roses; and won the applause of all the assembled guests, not only by her beauty, her perfect simplicity, and freedom from affectation, but by her gentle manners and winning courtesy.

Amongst the names of those presented to her, there was, however, not one which could render it necessary for her to exert the slightest degree of self-control.

She was sitting in the midst of a circle of lively ladies, and conversing with as much ease as if they had all been old acquaintances, when her husband entered the room, accompanied by a young man who might well have been called handsome, if the somewhat "*souffrant*" expression of his face had not too plainly proved that his sallow complexion was not that of health; and who was, moreover, distinguished by an air of ease and high breeding. With an animated glance he approached his young hostess, who rose to receive him without experiencing the slightest emotion; but she could not prevent herself from blushing up to the very roots of her hair, when John said,—

"My dear Blenda, permit me to present to you Count C—creutz. You have good cause to be flattered by his presence here, since he has delayed his journey to his own wedding by a day, in order to be able to dance with you this evening."

"It would be well for me," interposed the Count, "could I boast of having made any sacrifice, but if, at so early a stage of our acquaintance, I might venture to make a confession, it would be, that Mr. Blücher's invitation appeared far too tempting for my acceptance of it to have any claim to be regarded in such a light."

"You must permit me, however, to consider it so, Count C—creutz, in order that I may be the better able to express my thanks. But I should be grieved, indeed, if you were not able to make up on your journey for the time which you have thus lost."

"Why so, pray?"

"Why!—how can you ask such a question, when you are going to your own wedding! Your bride would, I think, scarcely forgive those who have interposed to retard your meeting."

"Oh!" said the Count, colouring slightly, and with a significant but indescribable movement of his head, "we have been engaged these eight years."

"What a fearful length of time!"

The Count only smiled.

(Blenda was subsequently informed by her husband that the Count appeared to fear lest the coming years might seem longer than those which were past; for that the young lady to whom he had been betrothed when he was only twenty and she fifteen, had the reputation of being as ugly as she was wealthy and high-born.)

John now interposed to turn the conversation.

"Do you know, my dear," said he to his wife, "that the Count, who is at Stockholm for the purpose of mounting his establishment, is to carry off nearly half of my stock of goods. You will, therefore, have to thank him for enabling me the sooner to gratify your wish by giving up my business."

These words sounded very strangely in the ears of the young wife. So here really was a Countess C—creutz, buying all her pretty things from Cousin John! but the Countess's name was not Blenda.

Such are the vicissitudes of fortune!

John was delighted that Blenda had extricated herself so well from her momentary embarrassment; and Blenda herself was not a little pleased to have had an opportunity of showing how well—had such been her fate—she could have displayed the ease and self-possession befitting a lady of quality; for, excepting the momentary flush upon her cheek, there had been no treacherous symptom to reveal that for a whole year she had looked upon herself almost as the betrothed bride of Count C—creutz.

Had the Count known that he had enjoyed the privilege of being considered as engaged in two places at once, it is just possible that his old flame might have been eclipsed by his new one.

To own the truth, some idea of the kind occurred even to Blenda herself; for both when he sate by her at table, and when he was her partner in the first quadrille—the ball having, of course, been opened by the bride with the bridegroom—there was no denying the eloquence of the looks he directed towards her; and every time that he congratulated his host, he gave a sigh to his hostess.

The Count's admiration was so undisguised as to be evident to all, and especially to the proud and happy mother,—who sate on the sofa, more splendidly dressed than she had ever been in her life, with a drooping feather in her turban,—and held forth to all those who would listen.

The approaching marriage of her illustrious ex-son-in-law did more than anything else to reconcile her to the son-in-law who had fallen to her lot; and the latter rose immensely in her estimation when, later in the evening, she heard him addressing the Count as plain C—creutz. Thereupon she plumed herself more than ever, and whispered to her neighbours on the right and left, that Count C—creutz and her son-in-law were exceedingly intimate friends.

* * * * *

When the labours of the day were over, that is, about sunrise on the following morning—for not till then had the last of the carriages

taken its departure—John enquired of his wife as to the impression produced upon her by her quondam imaginary flame, and whether she bitterly deplored his loss.

"Oh," replied she, "there is nothing for me to do but to get over it; especially as you see he was already engaged. But," added she, laying her head affectionately on her husband's shoulder, "had he been ever so disengaged, it would have been of no use; for, although, like you, he has dark hair, and is handsome too, still he is very far from being what you are; and I feel that I never could have fallen in love with him as I did with my Knight."

"Are you certain of that?"

"Quite; but it was pleasant, nevertheless, to see him, and convince myself of the fact; as well as to learn that, had it been *he* whom I had met at Wenersborg, it would not have been of any use."

"Well, then, my own beloved Blenda, there lingers not a shade of regret in your mind for your vanished dreams?"

"Not even a shadow of a shade. The only painful thought that ever recurs to me is connected with the poor Baron. His reply to my letter did him so much honour!"

Our hero's delicacy of feeling restrained him from making any remark upon the circumstance; but his glance of affection assured her that he was not jealous of the recollection which she still retained of a rival whose worth had been nobly proved.

* * * * *

It was two years after Blenda's marriage—and in those two years she had learnt every day more fully to appreciate the domestic happiness which she enjoyed with Cousin John—when three important events occurred, which rendered that happiness so complete, as to make Blenda feel that she could not even wish for anything beyond.

The first was the birth of a little daughter, which gave her the long-desired privilege of bearing the name of mother.

The second was the reception, in her own house, of a visit from Baron T—swärd and his pretty wife, who contracted a lasting friendship with little Mrs. Blücher.

And lastly, to make her amends for the fact that John had found reasons for continuing his business, and was, therefore, still ranked among the burghers of Stockholm, she had the unspeakable pleasure of dancing with his Royal Highness the Crown Prince, at a ball given at the Exchange on New Year's Day.

In conclusion, we must add to the list of blessings, that Madame von Kühlen had fortitude enough to witness this dazzling distinction—without fainting away.



RETURN TO the circulation desk of any
University of California Library
or to the

NORTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY
Bldg. 400, Richmond Field Station
University of California
Richmond, CA 94804-4698

ALL BOOKS MAY BE RECALLED AFTER 7 DAYS
2-month loans may be renewed by calling
(415) 642-6753
1-year loans may be recharged by bringing books
to NRLF
Renewals and recharges may be made 4 days
prior to due date

DUE AS STAMPED BELOW

JUN 4 1992

MAY 14 1993

JAN 29 1994

U.C. BERKELEY LIBRARIES



C031807935

M501622

YD 38055

